

Chittagong Armoury Raiders

REMINISCENCES

by

KALPANA DUTT

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To

MY DADAS AND COMRADES
WHO ARE STILL BEHIND THE BARS,
with the confidence that the people for
whom they suffered and fought will help
us to get them out.

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CONTENTS

	Pages
Preface	3
Introduction	5
Masterda	16
Ananta Singh	21
Ganesh Ghosh	31
Ambika Chakravarty	36
Savitri Debi	40
Suhasini Ganguli	45
Preeti Waddadar	50
Mani Dutt	58
Swadesh Roy	65
Santida	70
Tegra	75
Once All Stood By Us	80
How I became A Communist	85

PREFACE

Chittagong Armoury Raid is one of the most stirring episodes in our country's march to freedom. This volume contains reminiscences of its leader Surjya Sen, his lieutenants and young comrades written by one of them—Kalpana Dutt. To read them is to fall in love with them all, deepen our own patriotism and get greater faith in the destiny of our ancient country. They are quite a varied lot, of different ages and different sections of middle-class Bengali society. They embodied virtues we all admire. They fought as few have the courage to fight. Kalpana Dutt writes in the most direct form and from her own personal knowledge of the ideals that inspired them, the sort of comradeship that nurtured them. To read these reminiscences is to understand what made the leaders of the group legendary figures and the humblest of them household names where they were born and worked.

Kalpana Dutt escaped being hanged because she was a girl and only eighteen. She was condemned to become a prisoner for life by our British overlords. But our people won her freedom. She had gone to jail as a mere girl and came out as a young woman after serving only 8 years.

She describes in the most matter-of-fact manner how she got drawn towards our Party by very natural stages as she began to work. To read her own story is to understand a living phase of our national movement, how was it that in the thirties the vast majority of the terrorist detenus and prisoners became Communists. Their coming under the banner of our Party was for them at once an easy and a difficult step to take. It was easy because in the policy and practice of our Party they saw the more scientific and successful struggle for their own revolutionary dreams. It was difficult because they had to live down illusions and see through their own heads

where they had gone wrong and where they had to correct themselves to be able to continue fighting the country's battle to which they had pledged themselves in their teens. These reminiscences reveal how terrorism was the infant as Communism is the mature stage of their revolutionary lives.

Almost all the Chittagong Raiders, both the leaders within prison-walls and their followers who are outside are within our Party today. Our Party is thus not only the historic but the living heir of what the Chittagonians with great pride call the "Spirit of Surjya Sen", and the "Chittagong tradition".

In every Chittagong home Kalpana Dutt is called "Amader Meye",—our daughter. This daughter of Chittagong will seek, once again, the verdict of her parents, the people of Chittagong, as the Communist candidate in the coming Provincial Elections.

P. C. Joshi.

October 22, 1945.

INTRODUCTION

In 1928, Surjya Sen, Ananta Singh, Ganesh Ghosh and other revolutionary leaders of Chittagong were released from detention under the infamous Bengal Ordinance, and came back to Chittagong.

Their first thought on return was what could be done to free the country and in what way.

The traditional calculation of the terrorist revolutionary was that freedom could not be achieved without the aid of a strong power from outside. They had found that the British Government could not be dislodged by the killing of a handful of Government officials, a few Europeans or police officers. As a result, a feeling of despondency overtook the revolutionaries. The revolutionary youth of Chittagong wanted to break this inertia. They wanted to inspire self-confidence by demonstrating that even without outside help it was possible to fight the Government. For this their plan was open armed conflict, widespread planned action to raid the Government armoury and seize arms, cut communications and prevent the Government from getting reinforcements from other parts of India and attack not individual Europeans but raid the club where they were to be found in numbers and give battle. For a week Chittagong would be free! And later, if the Government brought in troops to take back Chittagong then they would fight without yielding and die fighting. Thus they thought their short but heroic legend would be blazoned forth all over the land and inspire new generations to fight for the freedom of their Motherland.

* * *

The eighteenth of April 1930. At 10 in the evening, simultaneous attacks began upon the Telegraph Office, the Armoury and the Police Barracks. The rail lines were tampered with at Nangalkot and Dhum. At the same time, a leaflet was broadcast all over the town declaring

that Gandhiji had given the call to break the law and so they would break the law of treason. Another leaflet explaining the object of the raid was distributed signed by the "President of the Indian Republican Army, Chittagong Branch": this terrorist party had named itself the Chittagong Branch of the Indian Republican Army, with Masterda (Surjya Sen) as its President.

At the Armoury, Major Ferrol was killed and two sentries lost their lives at the Police Barracks.

The Armoury and the Barracks were captured by the revolutionaries. The District Magistrate on arriving at the spot was also fired at, but was missed. He rushed to the jetty, and wirelessly abroad, and collecting all the available arms in the armoury at the jetty sent forces against the revolutionaries. From the hill opposite the Armoury where the water works were situated the Government counter-attack began. But despite their position of disadvantage, the revolutionaries were able to throw back the Government forces.

But it was dangerous to stay longer on that hill. And so before their departure they collected all the arms they could. What could not be carried, they decided to destroy by pouring petrol and setting fire to the whole Armoury.

The men who had suffered no loss in the fighting were now overtaken by an accident: as they were pouring petrol, one of them, Himangsu Sen, caught fire and got burnt all over. Anantada, Ganeshda and two others took the dying Himangsu to town, and he died there in hiding three days later. The rest of them turned to the hills to make preparations for a sweeping attack upon the town. It was here that Anantada and those who went down with them to the town parted company with the rest of the party.

The Battle of Jalalabad Hill! On 22nd April, at 4-30 in the evening the revolutionaries encountered the well-armed fully reinforced British troops. The revolutionaries were on Jalalabad Hill and the British troops on the hill opposite. A regular pitched battle went on till dusk,

when the troops were forced to fall back. Many were killed on both sides. Among Chittagong's revolutionary youth Jalalabad Hill became a saga of unyielding resistance.

In the very first volley from the British machine guns, eleven revolutionaries fell. Four were seriously wounded. Ambika Chakravarty, whose death in the battle was announced by a Government communique, was wounded but nevertheless escaped with two other wounded comrades. Only Ardhendu Dastidar was captured wounded and subjected to inhuman tortures by the police. He died a few days later in police custody.

No definite figures of casualties on Government side were available. Rumour said 150 soldiers were killed. The captain of the reinforcement that was brought from Agartola in Tippera District confessed to a railway employee that they had suffered heavy losses. Two or three months later when Ganesh Ghosh and others were taken prisoner, Sir Charles Tegart himself assaulted them, and cursing them said, "You have killed 64 of our men."

The plan of raiding the town had to be given up after the surprise Government attack at Jalalabad. A new decision was taken on the morrow of the battle: "Our work has not yet ended, the war with the Government has yet to be waged and the battle for freedom from now on has to be carried on by guerilla methods. Those who are ready to face the grim hardships of underground life as also the thousand-and-one dangers of guerilla warfare, let only those stay on. Others, who want to go back can fall out of the line." Moreover, some of those who had not yet come under police suspicion were specifically directed to return home in the interest of the movement itself.

Two days later, on April 24th, at Sadarghat in town, noticing a young man in a deserted house, the police grew suspicious. The boy immediately jumped down from the second storey and took shelter under a street culvert. Shots were exchanged until his revolver ran out of bullets, when the troops coming from the other end shot him

down. Amarendra Nandy was the name of the boy, and before taking to the hills after the Armoury Raid Masterda had sent him to town to establish contact with Anantada and others. After finishing his assignment he was on his way back when he heard about the Jalalabad incident and so he took the road to the villages, but he turned back to town pledged to avenge the death of his comrades. And on the way he himself gave his life.

Anantada's party could not link up with Masterda and the rest of the company. Hearing about the Jalalabad battle, they left the town. At Feni Station, the police detained four of them on suspicion, but they escaped from police custody by firing at one of the guards. This is celebrated as the Feni Incident.

Masterda led the rest of the party to the countryside. They were anxious to get on with their objective without a moment's delay—the Government was to be continuously harassed by constant attacks.

On the 6th of May a batch consisting of Debiprosad Gupta, Manoranjan Sen, Rajat Sen, Swadesh Roy, Phanindra Nandi and Subodh Chaudhury came out with the intention of attacking the European quarters along the riverbank. But the plan could not be put through. On the way back, they ran into a party of armed police near Kalarpole. In this encounter, four of them were killed and Subodh and Phani were wounded and taken prisoner. A number of goondas brought in to help the police were also killed and wounded.

As days passed, some of the boys were arrested, while many others were seized from their own homes. The whole of Chittagong was placed under the military and curfew was enforced everywhere. Among those arrested were the fathers of Rajat (killed at Kalarpole), Debi and Ananta Singh. The police threatened them with serious reprisals upon their sons and the others. Feverish efforts were made to get Crown approvers against the revolutionaries. Just at this moment Ananta Singh surrendered and thereby foiled the Government efforts at breaking the prisoners' morale.

In 1930, prosecution was launched against 30 of the prisoners including Ananta Singh and other leaders. A special tribunal was set up to try them, and the main charge against them was "waging war against the King Emperor." As all their activities started with the raid on the Armoury the trial came to be known as the Chittagong Armoury Raid Trial.

On September 1, 1930, the police surrounded a house at the dead of night at Chandranagore in Hooghly District, and Ganesh Ghosh, Ananda Gupta and Loknath Bai were captured and brought to Chittagong. In the Chandranagore clash, Jiban Ghoshal was killed by police bullets. With these arrests, the Armoury Raid Trial was started afresh.

Two months later, Ambika Chakravarty was also arrested in a very sick condition. The case against him was postponed and he was detained in S.M. Jail.

Fresh arrests were taking place every day and the police zoomed upon the people to get information about the revolutionaries had become intolerable. The revolutionaries once again realised that they could not just remain inactive, while there was no sense in just getting captured by the police. Masterda established links with those in jail and fresh plans began to be made.

On December 30, Ramkrishna Biswas and Kalipada Chakravarty shot dead Inspector Tarini Mukerji at Chandpur Station, mistaking him for the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Craig. They were tried in Calcutta, Ramkrishna Biswas was hanged and Kalipada was transported for life.

In June 1931 was discovered the dynamite conspiracy in Chittagong. Arms, electric wires, explosives, daggers, etc. were unearthed both inside and outside the jail while in the court premises and at other prominent places of the town dynamite was found buried underground.

Not only the public but the authorities too were taken aback by the discovery of this widespread plot. At once the bail granted to five of the accused in the Armoury Raid Case was cancelled and two of them were acquitted.

from their trial to be sent up in connection with what came to be known as the Dynamite Conspiracy. A few more arrests were made, and altogether eight were placed on the Dynamite Conspiracy Trial which too began before a special tribunal. The authorities tried to come to a settlement with Anantada and his men, the terms being that the accused would all plead guilty and in return, none would be heavily sentenced. The public were worried that these would get life sentence. When the judgment was delivered, it was found that three were given three years each while of the rest, some got six, some eight months. The public was impressed with the power of Ananta Singh and Ganesh Ghosh, with whom the Government itself was forced to come to terms.

Since the Armoury Raid, police Inspector Asanullah had become very much hated for his indiscriminate repression. His personal character was also said to be tainted. The people began to say: "The Swadeshis have done so much, can't they teach this scoundrel a lesson?"

In August 1931, on the football ground, fourteen-year old Haripada Bhattacharya riddled Asanullah with bullets killing him on the spot. Haripada was also caught there, and being absolutely confident that Haripada's guilt could be proved, the Government permitted his trial by jury. Although such an eminent eye-witness like Rai Bahadur Upen Roy Chaudhury was produced, the evidence did not go against Haripada and the jury gave a verdict of 'not guilty'. The Government, however, pursued the case to the High Court, got the verdict reversed and Haripada was given life transportation.

On March 1, 1932, judgment was delivered in the Armoury Raid Case. Sixteen were unconditionally acquitted but were imprisoned under the Bengal Ordinance. Anantada and twelve others were given life transportation; Ananta Singh's brother Nandulal Singh was sentenced to 3 years, Anilbandu Das to 5 years. Ananta Singh, Rajat and Debi's fathers were released at the time of the final charge-sheet.

Previous to 1930 girls had been taken into the party.

Since the Armoury Raid they began actively to participate in revolutionary action along with men. Masterda had decided that through this, he would show to our people a new and inspiring factor in the revolutionary movement.

In 1932, another clash took place between the police and the revolutionaries at a shelter in the village of Dhalghat. Here they lost Nirmal Sen and Apurva Sen and Capt. Cameron was killed on the Government side. Masterda and Preeti Waddadar were also there, but they escaped. The lady who gave them shelter, their son and two others were sentenced to four years' imprisonment each for harbouring the revolutionaries.

After the Dhalghat incident, Preeti was forced to go into hiding. Actually Preeti had come to Dhalghat to meet Masterda.

On September 24, 1932, another raid took place, this time upon Pahartali Railway Club, and Preeti led it. Thirteen were severely wounded according to official announcement, one Mrs. Sullivan was killed. Preeti herself on the way back committed suicide by taking potassium cyanide.

From her pocket was found a statement written by her and also a leaflet issued the same day. These stated that all that had happened since the Armoury Raid and was going to happen in the future was to be regarded as incidents in the war that the revolutionaries had declared against the British Government on the 18th April 1930, and so long as they were in bondage there could be no respite in this war. Eighty-four were arrested in connection with Pahartali raid, but all had to be released for want of evidence.

Now began the Armoury Raid Supplementary Case with Ambika Chakravarty and two others. After two months, Ambikada was sentenced to death. One of the other two got transportation for life while the other was jailed as a detenu. Later on, the High Court commuted Ambikada's death sentence to transportation for life.

By now I too had gone into hiding and was moving with Masterda and the rest of the party. Police vigilance

had severely tightened, the military, were stationed in every village, and every moment there was the danger of encountering them. In February 1933, we had another clash with the police at the village of Gairala; on our way to an appointment, we fell into a police cordon. After two hours of regular battle, Masterda and Brojen Sen, a local boy, were captured. Brojen later was given 4 years. The rest of us succeeded in escaping though Santi Chakravarty and another comrade were seriously wounded.

On the 19th May, while in a shelter at the village of Gahira, Anwara P. S., early in the morning we found that we had been surrounded by the police. For sometime, shots were exchanged. The owner of the house, Purna Talukdar, who had given us shelter was instantaneously killed by police firing. In my own presence, his younger brother Nisi Talukdar was wounded by a police bullet passing right through his heart. And with them was killed another young comrade, 16-year old Manoranjan Das. Tarakeswar Dastidar and myself were captured there. (Here too, the lady of the house was given 4 years' imprisonment.)

In June 1933, began the Armoury Raid Second Supplementary Case with Masterda, Tarakeswar Dastidar and myself. They were sentenced to death and I was given life transportation.

After this, one by one, all began to be captured. Santi Chakravarty, Mani Dutta and Kalikinkar Dey—these had somehow still kept up the organisation—were all arrested about this time.

The younger members then became almost desperate. They avenged Masterda's arrest. On the 2nd January, they killed Netra Sen at Gairala, for it was he who had informed the police about Masterda's shelter. On the same day, Himangsu Chakravarty, Nitya Sen, Haren Chakravarty and Krishna Chaudhury threw bombs on the cricket ground and fired shots. None of them was older than 16 or 17. Himangsu and Nitya died on the spot. Haren and Krishna were caught. After trial, they too were executed.

Ten days later, on the 12th of January at the stroke of midnight, the Government who had kept the entire town and the jail under military occupation, executed Surjya Sen and Tarakeshwar Dastidar.

* * * *

Despair is a word that was unknown to these invincible hearts. The Government's repression has no doubt tried to crush them down but never for a moment have they lost the love and esteem of their people. The cold, silent recess of the prison-cell gave them the time and the opportunity to study and recognise new ideologies.

And so they have come over to Communism, in which they have found the same measure of solidarity, discipline and selflessness that had marked their own movement. Out of the narrow groove of a handful of young men and women dreaming of the country's freedom through individual heroism, sacrifice, and unflinching devotion, they have moved on to the new and broader vista offered by Communism in which the people, and not a mere handful of individual heroes, have to be roused to the consciousness of their own strength and greatness.

It has thus meant for them both a continuity and a break with their revolutionary past: the same cherished goal of freedom beckons to them along this new path as in the old; while, instead of the fraternity of the handful of heroes they have come now to the world of the people, instead of being the leaders of the people they have come to realise that the very movement that they started should lead them to become the organisers of the entire people. The very logic of their dedicated life as also of their cherished goal has thus brought them over to Communism.

The Chittagong Group is undisputedly recognised as the best and the most successful that Bengal's "terrorist" revolutionaries have produced. And for them—not only those among them who are still behind the bars but us as well, who are free and have not lost faith in our people—for this entire group there was but one inescapable road, the way that Communism shows to the revolutionaries all over the world.

MASTERDA

I had come in touch with the terrorist party in 1929. I did not know Masterda even by name at that time. A short while before the Chittagong Armoury Raid, I was told by one of our associates: "When you go to Chittagong this time I shall take you to our leader, Surjya Sen".

But I missed him that time. Before I could get back to Chittagong, the Armoury Raid had taken place in April 1930. The papers were talking of the daring raid under Surjya Sen's leadership.

About three weeks later, I returned to Chittagong for the summer vacations from Calcutta. I saw plenty of signs of utter panic in official circles. There was a strict curfew order, police guards and search parties were to be seen everywhere. British men and women did not dare to stay in town after dusk. They spent the night in steamers! There was no doubt about it—there was utter panic in the ranks of the authorities.

All sorts of things used to go round about Masterda. How he slipped through a police cordon, dressed like an old *mali* (gardener). How he was seen talking to village-folk dressed like a *sanyasi*. How he walked through village after village, in broad daylight, talking carelessly to a police officer companion—who did not know who he was talking to. There were scores of stories like this about Masterda.

Uneducated village-folk used to say Surjya Sen knows mysterious 'mantrams'—nobody can catch him, he vanishes into thin air. He was a superman—what else can you call a man who kept the Government on tenter-hooks all the time?

Educated folk put the same feeling differently. They said, "God, what a leader! He does things which have not been seen since the Battle of Plassey!" They would whisper to each other about every single incident in Surjya Sen's life they knew of. Some of them would describe



MASTERDA (Surjya Sen)



AMBIKA CHAKRAVARTY

Sketch drawn in prison by Ramesh Chatterji who has been recently released after serving a term of twenty years.

where and how they had seen Surjya Sen, they would describe minutely every glimpse they caught of the great leader and every word they heard. A few would make up stories, so as to thrill their friends and go up in everybody's esteem.

The police tortured scores of people, trying to get them to inform on Surjya Sen or his associates. But they never got a word out of them. When the police declared rewards running to thousands of rupees for the capture of absconders—people laughed and scoffed at them and said, "Surjya Sen cannot be caught for money!" Some went through inhuman tortures because of Surjya Sen's exploits. They were innocent, but they stuck it out and it never occurred to them to blame Surjya Sen for their sorrows.

In fact, people used to make fun of the police and make monkeys out of them when their man hunt was on. Soldiers had been brought in from outside and were camping at Patia village. They had heard that Surjya Sen was in the village. One night 200 to 300 soldiers cordoned off "Surjya Sen's" house and asked the landlord in the morning, "Who are you?" The reply came, "Surjya Sen". There was excitement, "Surjya Sen?—which Surjya Sen?" they asked eagerly. "Master Surjya Sen"—was the quiet reply. The soldiers were overjoyed and arrested the man. They sent for the Intelligence Branch men from Chittagong town and got Surjya Sen's photographs. Then it dawned on them that they had made fools of themselves. This "Surjya Sen" was not the Surjya Sen, but the Head Master of the local school! People split their sides laughing at the military police. They twitted them "borrow some brains if you want to catch Surjya Sen"!

In June 1931 Masterda sent word that I was to meet him. It was a dark night with a slight drizzle. I was quietly waiting under a mosquito net in the front room of a house deep in the interior. Someone came and said 'hullo', then came another. I could not see much in the flickering light of an oil lamp. The two strangers were talking to each other under their breath, so I could not

make out who was Masterda. Then I came to know who was Masterda. He was a smallish, short man, very reserved. Nobody would guess that this quiet man was the daring "King of Chittagong". There was nothing remarkable about his appearance. He asked me how I had done my Intermediate Science examination which I had just sat for. I said, "Not very well". He asked again, "Why, were you given too much political work?" I got the impression from his tone that he did not like slackness in studies.

It was past two o'clock at night. Masterda had to go away well before dawn. So he went away, telling me he would see me again.

I was overwhelmed by this first meeting with Masterda. I felt a sense of joy, deep respect, wonder, a touch of fear—I felt as if I could do whatever he wanted me to do at a moment's notice. I was bursting to tell anyone I met after that—"I have talked to Surjya Sen!" I used to tell my comrade Preeti Waddadar, who had not seen Masterda: "Do you know, I think our Masterda is greater even than Doctorda" ('Doctorda' was the famous terrorist character in Sarat Chandra's **Pather Dabi**). Preeti used to say, "Yes, I too think so".

After this first meeting, I met Masterda several times. It seemed to me that all the legends about Masterda were true. I had told him once about the popular legends about him. He answered, "Not all the stories are true. But they show that our countrymen love us. That is why they don't want to hand us over to the police. And they try to drown the constant fear that we might be caught by attributing superhuman powers to us".

I was arrested in September 1932. When I came out on bail after two months, Masterda sent instructions that I should abscond. It was not easy for him to take this decision. He became a terrorist revolutionary in 1918. His guru was present at his wedding night and he never lived with his wife for ten years till her death in 1928. It was an iron rule for the revolutionaries that they should keep aloof from women. Masterda told me one day, "I just could not make up my mind about letting girl revolution-

aries abscond. But their bravery and steadiness made up my mind for me". He never hesitated to change his mind when he found he was wrong.

When I was absconding with him Masterda used to tell me about Ananta Singh and Ganesh Ghosh. I used to get a very vivid idea of these colleagues of his from the way he described them and the warmth with which he spoke of them. He used to say, "whatever I have been able to do is because of them." There was a common saying in Chittagong, "As long as there is a Surjya Sen, hundreds of Anantas and Ganesh's will be made."

He used to tell us how India would become free by fighting the way the Irish fought. It was when I was with him that I read Dan Breen's "My Fight For Irish Freedom" several times. Dan Breen was Masterda's ideal. He named his organisation the Indian "Republican Army, Chittagong Branch" after the Irish Republican Army. He himself was its President.

Masterda used to say—our aim is to win freedom—not to mount the gallows and merely get killed. But we are a handful, we shall not get freedom through our own acts alone. Our revolutionary acts must awaken the masses and draw them more and more to the path of revolutionary struggle. This is where our sacrifice for the country is valuable.

He did not believe in political dacoities. He used to say that they never had to worry about funds. Just before the Armoury Raid, they estimated the cost at Rs. 15,000. Dacoities were banned. It was decided that the boy who got the largest amount of funds would have the honour of being the first to go into action in the raid. In those days, every youngster was eager to go into action and die for his country. Boys from well off families brought Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 3 000 or Rs. 500 of the family jewellery. When the cash-collection campaign was in full swing, a boy came to Masterda and started weeping. Nobody could make out what was the matter. Then he came out with his story. His mother was very poor and had no cash at all. He had tried very hard but it was no use. So

he had broken his mother's safe the night before and brought a pair of silver bangles which would fetch Rs. 2 or Rs. 3 at least. Masterda was touched and promised to put him No. 1 on the list of boys going into action.

Masterda was very fond of his comrades and used to look after them with utmost care. He used to help them out of family difficulties too, when necessary. Underground life was hard and uncertain, but he never allowed anyone to suffer for want of good food. He used to say, "I can save up cash by being stingy. But my job is to save my cadre, not cash." He even fixed up sing-song in the underground dens—so that the monotony of underground life would be broken. He himself used to take part in these social evenings. At first sight, he seemed very reserved and forbidding, but when one got to know him better, his great good humour was infectious. He used to say that keeping cheerful is one of the biggest tasks of a revolutionary.

He was deeply human too. He used to show an awful lot of strain when talking of his dead comrades. But while in action or in face of danger, all his nervousness vanished.

In June 1932, he was staying in Dhalghat village. Nirmal Sen was with him and Preeti Waddadar had come to see him. The police got on the scent somehow and cordoned off the house. Both sides opened fire and after a while both Captain Cameron and Nirmalda were wounded. Preeti was unknown to the police, she was not an absconder, she had merely come to see Masterda. But she could not abandon her wounded comrade, Nirmalda. It was not easy for Masterda to tear himself away from his life-long associate. But he did not believe in self-immolation. He had greater responsibilities on his shoulders. He tore himself away from Nirmalda, together with Preeti.

In face of danger, he was amazingly calm. Once, in the early days of my life as an absconder, everyone was asleep but I could not sleep because of the icy cold. Suddenly I heard loud knocks on the door and the old woman who had given us shelter cried out in alarm. Peeping out of the window I found the courtyard filled with Gurkha

soldiers. I woke up Masterda and tried to light up the torch. Masterda warned me not to light the torch and went downstairs having asked others in the room to stand by. The Gurkhas did not actually spot us that time—but I have seldom seen such amazing coolness in face of danger.

I have heard other stories of his presence of mind. When the Dakhineswar bomb-factory was discovered by the police some time about 1925, a three-storey building in Sovabazar (Calcutta) was also raided by the police the same night. Masterda and his companions used to stay here and work at Dakhineswar. He was a light-sleeper and woke up at the first sound of footsteps about the house. He got up quickly and escaped while the police were busy arresting others in the room! He just walked past them out of the room and jumped on to the roof of an adjoining house. When the police finally woke up to the fact that Surjya Sen was involved in the raid, he had escaped.

Nobody could make out Surjya Sen by his appearance. Nirmalda, who was a giant of a man, was usually taken to be Masterda. But even then, all classes of people have given him shelter. He was very particular about not bothering those who gave him and his comrades shelter. By the end of 1932, police vigilance had slackened. They thought that after two years of search, they could not find Surjya Sen—he must have gone out of the district. That is why they had slackened their watch. But after the Pahartali raid and after Preeti and I began absconding, they were convinced that he was still in Chittagong. Soldiers were brought in again from outside and camps were set up in the villages to smell him out. Everyone advised Masterda to go out of Chittagong. He said “No, the whole purpose of this underground struggle here is to build up an organisation here. I don’t see why I should go out of action and merely keep myself safe.”

February 1933. Masterda and I were going together to keep an appointment—I was in front. After we had taken a few steps forward, rifle bullets began

shrieking past. We had walked into a police cordon. I tried to run back the way we had come and saw one of our boys go down after being hit on the head. Then I ran into Masterda again in the bushes. He said: "I know you don't know the ins and outs of this place—so I was waiting for you." Then, after a few steps forward, I slipped into a pond. The Gurkhas ran up from behind and caught Masterda by the waist. That was how Surjya Sen was caught. I never saw him again. The man who was the informer was assassinated shortly afterwards, but no one would give evidence against those who killed him—although everyone knew who did it.

Towards the end of his underground days, Masterda became a bit worried about the future. He used to say, "I feel I have become a bit too liberal nowadays." We also noticed that he was not very strict any longer about seeing people—he would meet anyone who came. Morale among the boys began to go down—sense of discipline was lacking. He used to say, "Now my time is over". Towards the end, he had started writing his autobiography for the benefit of those who would carry forward his work. It could not be finished and the police seized whatever had been written out.

Three months after Masterda was caught I was arrested, together with Tarakeswar Dastidar. We were all three tried together. When I went to jail, I found Masterda had taken it for granted that he would be hanged and was busy handing over charge. He used to explain the jobs to be done to Tarakeswar, sitting in the dock in the court-room—he had the impression that Tarakeswar would not be hanged. Inside the jail too, he would manage to have long talks with Tarakeswar. They were both under special guard. But Masterda had brought the Gurkha guards under his influence. They would open the gates of the cells at night.

On the 14th August, 1933, he was sentenced to death. He tried to put us on our feet by telling us that appeals would be made to the High Court and the Privy Council

if necessary. He also assured me that he would see me before he was hanged.

He was hanged on January 13th, 1934. But I did not know it. Much later, in Rajshahi jail, Chittagong prisoners told me that he was hanged at midnight despite all conventions. His relatives were not given charge of the body. He left his torch behind for us to carry forward.

I just could not believe that Masterda was no more. But I had taken a vow: We shall carry forward your heritage!

In May 1939, I had just come out of jail. A hawker said, "The day they hanged Surjya Sen, the sun did not dawn."

I cannot forget what a Muslim peasant told me in the village where Masterda was caught, during the period when I was working to rouse them against the Japanese aggressors who were then only a stone's throw away, "Are we 'dendas' to go over to the Japs? It is those 'dendas' who betrayed Surjya Sen and Subhas Bose is a 'denda' too!" (Local Muslim peasants have given this term of contempt to Hindus).

The spirit of Surjya Sen is still alive in Chittagong. But it has to fight an uphill battle against corrupt elements in our society who have grown strong and powerful profiteers, war contractors, those who trade in destitute women on mass scale. Those of us who worked with him are filled with shame that Surjya Sen's Chittagong should be reduced to its present plight. But we have sworn never to give up the battle which Surjya Sen began. The common people of Chittagong remember him and aid us in our struggle to carry forward his tradition.

ANANTA SINGH

The famous Ramamoorthy Circus had come to Chittagong. I was a small girl then. The family went along to see it. Elephants walked over the chest of a giant of a

man. A heavy, strong-armed giant holds back a car whose engine is running full-speed. I used to get thrilled by it all. An Englishman broke a hefty set of chains tied to a car—they were thick and strong! Then the White giant threw out his chest—'Tarzan' fashion—and challenged Chittagonians to dare come and repeat his performance. An unknown youth took up the challenge. He walked up and broke the chain while the audience watched with bated breath—was he not foolhardy to try? I had heard then that his name was Ananta Singh.

After that, I never stopped hearing his name in Chittagong. He became my hero. In 1922, Rs. 17,000 was looted in the political railway hold-up. People took it for granted it was Ananta Singh's doing. Tales of Ananta Singh's daring exploits filled every Chittagong home. There was a clash between the revolutionaries and the police when an underground bomb-factory was raided very near Chittagong town. Prafulla Roy, a notorious Police Inspector, was shot dead. To us young girls he had become our 'Robin Hood'—a legend, a symbol of freedom and fearlessness.

Ananta Singh could take deadly aim with the revolver on either hand. He had struck terror in the ranks of Chittagong goondas. His strength was limitless. Homes used to buzz with stories about him. "He is one in a thousand" mothers would say, "if I have a son, he should be like him."

I have never actually seen Ananta Singh. In May 1929, a political conference was being held in Chittagong. The streets were full of 'young boys' in khaki, with lathis in their hands. They were Ananta Singh's volunteer corps—getting ready to defend the conference against goondas.

There was a women's session in the conference. Some goondas hurled stones and bricks at the assembled women and ran away to take shelter in an adjoining house. Ananta Singh rushed into the house himself and taught them the lesson of their lives.

But Ananta Singh's men did not defend political meetings and conferences only. They were ready to de-

fend any social gathering or institution against anti-social elements. In the great local melas his men would act as volunteers to look after the children, the old and the infirm. They would all leave the mela—thousands of them—heaping their blessings on Ananta Singh and his men.

On the 18th of April 1930, a batch of armed revolutionaries raided the Chittagong Armoury, burnt the 'Police lines', put the Telegraph Office out of order, removed rails from the railway tracks. The word went round; "Ananta Singh's lads have done it again!"

They were not very far wrong. Masterda told us once: "When Ananta gave me his plan for a raid on the Armoury and an uprising in Chittagong—I had not taken it seriously. Now he has fulfilled his dreams." In fact, Ananta Singh had worked with single-minded devotion to realise this plan ever since he came out of internment in 1927—right up to 1930.

He had been interned together with Ganesh Ghosh and others under the Bengal Ordinance in 1925 and 1926. The Bengal Government was trying desperately to stamp down terrorism which had revived after the failure of the 1920 Non-Co-operation movement. But Ananta Singh came out of internment in 1927 and got to work to set up Physical Culture Clubs—in many cases he himself acted as the Instructor. He wanted physical fitness among the youth to be able to build up revolutionaries. But he did not concentrate only on physical culture. He taught them horsemanship, to handle automobiles, lathi and sword-play, boxing and so on. He was an expert at all these arts. His skill with the revolver was the talk of the town—how he could use either hand at it, how he could shoot down a bird in flight, how he could score a Bull's Eye on a fruit perched on a boy's head without the boy suffering even a scratch.

Every month, Ananta Singh used to take his lads out on excursions, where he taught them to handle fire-arms. Anantada never asked his lads to do anything without first setting a personal example himself. One of his well-known sayings was "Do a thing yourself before asking

anybody else to do it." When the call went out to raise Rs. 15,000 for the Armoury Raid he led the way by getting Rs. 3,000 himself. His father had opened his safe. Ananta Singh picked up a bag containing Rs. 3,000 and said, "I am taking my share, father."

He trained up Chittagong's best lads to be ready to face death at any time. But he himself took senseless risks to save them from death as often as he could. I remember one incident. It was exactly 18 days before the raid.

Bombs were being made at Ananta Singh's own house. Tarakeswar was making them himself and demonstrating to others. Suddenly, there was a blinding flash and a terrific explosion. Tarakeswar's face and chest were badly burnt. One or two others were hurt. It happened in broad daylight and there was a deafening explosion. The police might arrive at any moment. The whole outfit had to be shifted in a few minutes. The biggest problem was to shift the wounded Tarakeswar and to arrange for a safe shelter for him. He asked Anantada to shoot him so that everything else was saved. Anantada said,

"No! As long as I am alive, I shall do my best to keep you alive. My job is not to kill, but to save lives."

He asked the others to clear all traces of the bomb factory and himself took Tarakeswar out in his car. All day he drove through the streets with Tarakeswar in his car. At dusk, they went to a friendly doctor's place. Treatment was fixed up for Tarakeswar and he recovered slowly.

He took an accident during the Armoury Raid the same way. Himangsu Sen was badly burnt while setting the armoury alight by pouring petrol. Nothing could be done—the decision was to shoot him. Himangsu did not want to die. Anantada handed over charge to the others and himself took Himangsu to Chittagong town, where arrangements were made for proper treatment. Then Anantada returned to his post.

Anantada was barely twenty or even in his 'teens

then. It was long before the Armoury Raid. The police had given chase. Anantada was with Masterda (Surjya Sen), Ambika Chakravarty and one more comrade. Shots had been exchanged. One shot got one of the party on the knee—he collapsed and could not get up again. There was no time to think, it was impossible to abandon the wounded comrade. Anantada put the comrade on his back and ran up a steep hill-slope with bullets whizzing up after him from the rifles below. When they were over the top, the knee was examined and it was found there was no bullet wound. The shock had suddenly made the comrade feel groggy about the knees.

His fearlessness and his deep affection for his comrades made every decent youngster in Chittagong worship him. Masterda used to say of him.

“He is a born leader, he never had to fight for leadership. His courage, his noble example, his love for his comrades—his natural gifts have made him a leader among men. But he is swayed too much by sentiment. His deep humanity can become a source of weakness in a revolutionary.”

In those days our common idea was that revolutionaries should be hard, austere, aloof.

The revolutionary lads of Chittagong were amazingly fond of him. They would literally die without question at his command. That is why he surrendered in a strange way after the police-hunt—lasting for months—had failed to track him down after the Armoury Raid. Many young lads were rounded up after the raid. Some of them were outwitted in the police-examination and gave out evidence without knowing it. Ananta Singh surrendered and met them in jail. The boys who had let out evidence were kept isolated from the rest. When they were taken before Ananta Singh, they burst into tears and every single one repudiated whatever he was supposed to have let out. That is why the Government could not find a single approver to put up in a court of law.

His strange surrender also bears out his immense self-confidence and sense of dignity. On the 28th of June

1930, he surrendered at Calcutta. He wrote to the D.I.G. of the Intelligence Branch, Mr. Lowman, before his surrender:

"I am surrendering because of personal reasons. Don't think for a minute that I have no one to give me shelter or that I am repentant. I am not at all repentant, nor is there any difficulty about getting shelter. I can get shelter anywhere in Bengal, anywhere in India—even outside India"

There could be only one reason for this surrender by a man who had driven the police crazy by outwitting them again and again. He wanted to strengthen his lads so that not one broke down under cross-examination and torture.

The people said, "Shabash Ananta Singh! Who else could do a thing like that? When he finishes his job in jail with his comrades—he would be out again." Even Government officials bowed their heads before him. Mr. Springfield, D.I.B. Superintendent of Chittagong, said after my own arrest: "I have the greatest admiration for Ananta Singh. I have never seen a lad like this. It is difficult to find such a character even in free countries."

He had an amazing personality and was very resourceful. In jail, he brought not only ordinary convicts but the guards too under his influence. He was a master at the art of keeping contact with people outside. He made arrangements for getting not only books and papers, but even arms—for the execution of a plan he had drawn up for breaking out of jail. That plan miscarried because of a tiny slip-up by some comrades connected with it. Masterda used to say: "If Ananta says he can turn the world upside down, I will not be able to say, I don't believe it. He is capable of it."

I have never seen Anantada. I got in touch with him directly only after he had already gone to jail. He was strongly against taking girls into the revolutionary network—he did not trust us. So much so, that he would not trust men who were associated with any girl. He used to say: "I can keep a person at a distance because I don't

trust him. At the most, it will be injustice done to one, perhaps. But I cannot risk everything by taking chances with anyone. That will finish all we have worked for." He was terribly strict in this matter. After his surrender, he got in touch with me. To me the highest honour in the world was to have won his trust. His self-confidence was infectious—I too began to feel nothing was impossible, that everything could be done. That is why I was both thunder-struck and overjoyed when he sent me details about his new project. The plan was to begin operations all over the town. Meanwhile, there would be a rising inside the jail too. Part of the aim was to get Anantada and others out of jail. His courier asked me: "Are you sure you will be able to take on this job?" I answered simply, "Of course, I can." The lad said, "Remember, Anantada says nothing is impossible in this wide world."

The slightest contact with Anantada gave one an accession of immense strength and self-confidence. So I set to work to prepare gun-cotton and other explosives. Strictly according to his instructions, I used to bring bottles of acids from Calcutta. I was only 16 or 17 years old at the time. But I felt I could do anything.

The project fell through in the end because of a tiny hitch. But the authorities were staggered at the vast scale on which the thing was planned and the daring idea behind it. Dynamite wiring had been laid at various points in the city, round the jail. Arms had been smuggled into the jail itself.

Six or seven lads had been caught by the police, but it was difficult to get the evidence. The local authorities were afraid their failure to detect such a widespread and 'daylight' conspiracy would discredit them. So they opened negotiations with Ananta Singh. A 'compromise' was arrived at. The arrested boys would be let off with light sentences and they were to plead guilty. Even on the meagre evidence at their disposal, the authorities could easily have got these lads sentenced to transportation for life. But they were let off with less than a year in jail.

In the dock, he would often cross-examine the pro-

secution witnesses on behalf of the defence. Even experienced lawyers used to wonder at his amazing skill in tearing their evidence to pieces with biting logic and withering cross-examination. The local daily *Panchajanya* used to put admiring headlines, "The Lion-Cub Cross-Examines Witnesses"—and used to get sold off in no time.

Everyone—both inside and outside jail—took it for granted that he would be hanged. Huge crowds used to line the approaches to the courts to catch a last glimpse of the prisoners. But Ananta Singh was not hanged. Not only that, the authorities did not even dare to declare the sentence of transportation for life publicly. They knew how much the people loved him and they were afraid of their anger. The British Judge gave his judgment inside the prison-walls and left Chittagong in a great hurry by plane. Right from the morning of that day, troops were posted at every street-crossing and the youth were not allowed to stir out of their homes on that day.

I was sitting in the Chemistry class of Chittagong College on that day. Only two or three students who lived nearby had been able to turn up—even the Professor had been delayed. The professor came an hour late. His first words were: "Sentence has been awarded to Armoury Raid accused." I was all keyed up—could even hear my heart-beats. All the other students held their breath—you could see the terrible suspense they were passing through from the tense expression on their faces. The professor continued: "No one has been sentenced to death—not even Ananta Singh." Everyone was struck dumb with joy for a few moments. The professor spoke again: "They have all been sent off outside Chittagong by steamer."

"Ananta Singh has not been hanged!"—was the cry on every lip in the streets, in the homes all over Chittagong. When I came back home, my grandma said: "I made offerings to Shiva every morning—I wanted Ananta to be protected. Shiva has heard my prayer."

I had not only heard of Anantada's heroic deeds—from the common people and from Masterda himself. I got to know him through his writings too. He wrote his

life story in jail and sent it out to us. His writing was simple and straightforward. There were no fine phrases and complicated constructions. He put his heart into it and applied a keen mind, and the result made wonderful reading. You could almost sense the writer next to you and get carried off by his powerful, irresistible logic. It was after reading his writings that I had got to know that he who feels intensely and has a clear understanding can write well. Nothing else is required for writing pieces that hit the mark.

He was very frank and straightforward in his dealings with all. He believed in saying straight out what he felt. He kept off those who would get hurt by his plain-speaking. He used to keep off those whom he did not like too. But once he was convinced that he had been wrong in his judgement—he did not hesitate to admit it frankly.

Long after I first got in touch with him, he sent a message:

"I had a wrong idea about the worth of women in revolutionary work. They should forgive me for my mistake."

Masterda used to tell us that Anantada did not know the meaning of the word frustration. He had never taken on a job without finishing it.

Other Andaman prisoners had come to accept Communism after a lot of heart-searching and serious thinking. They had come to see and themselves feel the futility of terrorist action. Anantada and his lads were the last to come over. Because they were unaware of any frustration. They had only seen the success of their plans, the amazing affection of the common people for them and the growing mass support for their struggle. They found it hard, very hard, to admit that the path of terrorism was the 'wrong path'.

But when finally, through deep thought and keen discussion, they came to accept Communism—they never looked back even once.

When Chittagong was being bombed by Jap airmen—they could not keep quiet. They sent a ringing call from jail to the people of Chittagong to stand up and fight. The people of Chittagong knew the value of that message. The authorities knew it too. That is why they did not release the prisoners—but cynically printed their appeal in handbills and distributed them widely among the people.

But Chittagong is not that Chittagong any more. After the famine, in the last two years, the great tradition of the revolutionaries has been washed away.

Chittagong homes used to buzz with tales of Ananta Singh's heroism—those very homes today have become dens of cowardice and iniquity. Ananta Singh had beaten the life out of the goondas in Chittagong—but today Chittagong is under *goondashahi*. In Ananta's Chittagong, women used to pray to Shiva for the safety and release of Ananta and his lads. Today, women in Chittagong sell themselves to lustful soldiers and greedy contractors.

The youth of Ananta's Chittagong took after the proud Ananta's character—the old and young blessed their boys, that they should grow up to be Ananta Singhs. Today the youth learn to be pimps early in life to wallow in women and wine, to make fun of patriots and patriotism! The old are not proud of the youth any more. They weep themselves blind cursing the monsters and the she-wolves to whom they have given birth.

Fighters for freedom do not fight with the spirit of Ananta Singh any more. Their arms have become weak, they pass their days in despondency.

That is why, the old often ask in Chittagong's villages—"Can you tell us when Ananta Singh will come back to us?" To them, Ananta Singh symbolises Chittagong's golden age. They think, with his return, the glorious days will come back. They know no gang of goondas can stand for a minute before Ananta Singh. He will come back to fight for his people—against the gangs. The black-marketeers, profiteers and contractors will scatter like dead leaves.



TEGRA





GANESH GHOSH

GANESH GHOSH

Ganeshda did not really belong to Chittagong, but to Jessore. His father was in the cloth business in Chittagong. That is why he was brought up in Chittagong and not in Jessore. Chittagonians used to say: 'Ganesh Ghosh and Ananta Singh are kindred souls'. The revolutionary lads used to say: 'They complement each other.' That is why in my mental make up too, the two were inseparable—I could not think of one without the other.

Masterda (Surjya Sen) would tell me in the old days what happened when different groups were being formed with their group leaders for action in the famous Armoury Raid. Ganeshda insisted: 'I don't want to lead any group myself. Put me in Ananta's group. If I must face death, I want to be with Ananta'. He would not budge and had his way.

In the Armoury Raid, Ganeshda played a very big part. Ananta used to decide what had to be done where. Ganeshda used to help to plan out the details and manage the agitation to rouse the people through leaflets, etc. They planned and worked out everything together. They made an ideal revolutionary team.

I have seen Ganeshda only twice--and that too from a distance. In 1929, big leaders had come for the Political Conference—Subhas Bose, Latika Bose, Jyotish Ghosh, Nripen Bannerjee etc. I had been to meet them at the station. Suddenly, I heard tramping of feet behind me and a military order: "halt!" I turned round to see volunteers drawn up in formation. I heard their G.O.C. was Ganesh Ghosh.

At 8-30 next morning, there was a students' meeting at the Town Hall. We were all very enthusiastic about it and turned up at the hall at 7-30 in the morning. I found the pandal absolutely empty—nobody had turned up. Ganesh Ghosh, with his face bandaged up, was on guard—all alone. He had been injured in a fight with the goondas who attacked the conference the night before. The students' meeting would not begin for some time yet. The

volunteers had to be sent home after a long period on duty—so he was mounting guard alone. The pandal was a huge affair—stretched all over the Town Hall grounds. There was every likelihood of the goondas attacking again. But here he was injured and alone—ready to meet a whole pack of ruffians if necessary. I went back with a feeling of deep reverence for this extraordinarily brave man.

I actually got to know him only when he came to jail after the Armoury Raid. I had heard of him as one of the outstanding leaders of the raid and had also heard of his bravery. But in jail, I got to know him still better as a poet and a writer. In jail, he used to write the lives of fallen martyrs. He wrote vivid verses putting the picture of the Jalalabad battle (April 22, 1930). He wrote generally of the beliefs, the faith, of a revolutionary fighter.

He had a beautiful, easy style. Every word was simple and clear. There was a great deal of sympathy and feeling in every line he wrote. It made you burst into tears, swept you off your feet and also deepened your self-confidence as a revolutionary a thousandfold. He used to write and send the pieces to us outside. At the courts, during the famous trial of the Armoury Raid prisoners, Loknath Bal—one of the prisoners and a close associate of Ananta Singh and Ganesh Ghosh—used to recite Ganesh's verses in a ringing voice and hold everybody spell-bound.

The lads outside jail used to know every verse of Ganeshda's by heart. They made new recruits by firing their imagination with these powerful verses. I can't remember all his verses after so many years. But in one of his poems he has described how he took the revolutionary path—when he was seized by a savage revolutionary ardour, when the very stones around seemed to cry 'mutiny!'

In his 'Chittagong Brigade,' he wrote of the fight he put up with his 58 comrades in the battle of Jalalabad Hill.

The idea behind the Chittagong Armoury Raid was

that they would be able to hold Chittagong for seven days. In those seven days, the police lines would be broken up, entry of the military into the district would be blocked. For seven days, Chittagong would be free. On the seventh day, the patriots would die to a man in defending their freedom. In the annals of the struggle for Indian freedom—this tale would remain inscribed in letters of gold. It would be an unending source of inspiration to all, forever!

But they had to get ready to die from the second day itself. Here are the first lines of the 'Chittagong Brigade':

Steadily

Step by step

Forward marched

To the grave,

To the field of fame

Forward marched

The Youths brave.

Then he wrote 'The fifty-eight marched on for four days, over the hills—without food, without sleep—haggard but determined. They pushed on under the blazing April sun, without any cover—over the bleak, waterless hilly wastes. The water-bottles are hot—like pieces of live charcoal. Can't shoulder the rifles. They are sizzling hot.'

Then—"Tegra opened martyrdom's gate," he wrote. Tegra was the first to fall before machine-gun bullets. He was Loknath Bal's younger brother. Then others—many others—were mown down. Ganeshda ended this piece:

When can their glory fade

O the brave fight they gave

Honour the Chittagong Brigade

The noble fifty-eight.

The last few lines were his challenge—to all who would forget or sneer at the daring martyrs of Chittagong.

Everyone was certain that Ganesh Ghosh and Ananta Singh would be hanged. They were not afraid of death—they had no regrets. They were revolutionaries who had given up all the good things of life for the sake of an

ideal and a job to be done. Death had no terror for them—they were ready to face it with a smile. This is what Ganesbda wrote in his 'Bandi Mata'—(Our mother in chains).

"Our mother's eyes are filled with tears. Her voice is broken and sad. A thousand wrongs have been heaped on her head. She calls, 'which son of mine will fight for a mother's honour?' Those in front slink back in fright and fear. A noble youth pushes his way forward. He throws out his chest and answers in a ringing voice: 'I will give my life for my motherland!'"

Then began the march of the youth against all cruelty, oppression and dishonour. He fought on until the oppressor's massive weapon struck him down. The youth was made prisoner and sentenced to death. He is bloody but unbowed, he says, defiantly:

'You dare to threaten us with death? Death has no terror for us.'

The prisoner awaits the great day—when the gods will answer his prayer and greet him in the shape of death. That day will be remembered as a day dyed red in the blood of martyrs.

"Those early hours filled with sweetness—before day-break. The hangman comes and knocks 'Come with me to the gallows'. The prisoner was heavy with sleep—dreaming of a hero's noble mission. He asked the goddess in his sleep 'who are you—so kind, so merciful?' She answers 'I am death, your time has come. I have come to take you away.'"

Most of his verses I have forgotten through the years that have passed. But I recall vividly those dedicated to the Jalalabad battle. I remember how the court employees used to stop all work to crowd round and listen spell-bound when they were recited in the court room.

It was not only verse that he wrote. He wrote and sent out of jail the history and activities of the Bengal revolutionaries and particularly of the Chittagong heroes. He put down in prose and verse whatever he thought or

felt. This is how he spread awakening among the people and helped to build up the organisation outside—even when he was in jail.

His revolutionary career started about the same time as Ananta Singh's. But they had quite a large difference in outlook. He was a different type of man as compared to Anantada. He did not care a jot for any superstitions. I recall one incident. They were sending me to Calcutta on urgent work. Even a day's delay was costly. Anantada said "We shall send her off on a Friday, it was the day of the 'Eastern Uprising' (Ireland). Thursday won't do. We have always been out of luck on that day. You remember, on a Thursday, in the Kalarpole battle, we lost four of our boys." Ganeshda would not agree. He said "Not a moment's delay! Friday would be too late. Let her go on Thursday. We shall work hard to make every day of the week our lucky day."

He had amazing self-confidence. He did not believe in fate, in God and religion. He used to say 'All this is a sign of faint-heartedness, of lack of faith in oneself. Manliness, single-minded devotion to a cause, self-confidence—these are the things that bring success.'

'I had the idea,' Masterda would say, 'that Ananta's faith in God accounts for his success. But I find that Ganesh has shown the correctness of his beliefs in his own practical success.' Before going to the Ordnance Jail, there was a big difference between Ananta and Ganesh. Ananta's powerful personality and his hard-working capacity would catch the eye more than Ganesh's. But when they both came out of jail after two years—I found neither Ananta nor Ganesh was the same any more. They had both changed and blended into one, so to speak!

In his outlook, he differed somewhat from the other revolutionaries of those days. He used to say 'Our supreme aim is not just to mount the gallows and die a brave death. We must live and fight bravely and make our mission successful. That is why we must do everything possible to fight and live.'

Like Anantada, he too was sentenced to transportation for life. And it was there that he was able to reconsider their past policy and experience, study developments in the modern world and arrive at the Communist viewpoint.

In 1939 I myself came out of jail. I was dazed and staggered by the immense changes that had taken place all around. Where did we fit in? I could not quite see my course. I had come to know and support Communism. What Communists were trying to do, I too wanted done. But I could not make out the root causes of our error. Ganeshda and Anantada started writing letters to me from prison. It was the same, incisive style—only the substance had changed. He would show in terms of our own experience—in very great detail—how what we mean by freedom can only come by the Communist way. His writing was irresistible, he would lift you up in the air, so to speak, and ram home the single conclusion: 'there is no way forward except the Communist way.' Their letters helped me to find my way into the Communist Party.

When some people tried to make use of Communism to serve their own petty ends—Ganeshda would be furious. Through merciless criticism, he would tear the mask off their faces. No one could escape his powerful pen.

Today, Chittagong is burning to ashes her noble traditions. She refuses to abide by any of the elementary rules of civilised society. Ganesh Ghosh is wanted to give back social morals and to restore sober thinking in Chittagong society.

His powerful indictment of anti-social elements would still run like a writ in Chittagong. His word would give our people the glow of freedom and moral revival, which would win against all the forces of evil.

AMBIKA CHAKRAVARTY

There were several leaders of the Chittagong Armoury Raid whom I had never actually seen. Ambikada was one

of them. When I joined the Chittagong revolutionaries as a young girl, I found that what intrigued most of the others—who were not much older—was that Ambikada wore a long beard! That according to them, was what marked this leader out from the rest.

There was another revolutionary group—different from ours—the ‘Anushilan Party.’ One of their leaders Charubikash Dutt, had a lame foot. So whenever our boys met their boys, they shouted out ‘L. P.! L. P.!’—short for ‘Lame Park.’ But Ambikada’s beard helped the Anushilan boys to give us a nick-name, too—they would shout back: ‘Beard Square!’ So it was not surprising that we should all be eager to know all we could about Ambikada.

I used to ask Masterda (Surjya Sen) when I was underground with him to tell me about Ambikada. He used to say “Ambika Babu is a steeled revolutionary among us. He never gets carried away by feelings of joy or sorrow—he is not the least bit temperamental. He is never a slacker or careless in his work—nor can he stand slackness or jumpiness in others”. I saw him in action during the Raid. We had fixed up that after the Raid was over, those who led the raid would go to the police barracks to lend a hand to the other batch in action there. When the Raid was a success, the boys began to celebrate their victory. Ambikada didn’t like it at all. He called the boys to order and said: ‘You can celebrate later on. Go off to the police lines now.’ Everyone felt very guilty and made off.

I heard many more amazing tales of Ambikada’s exploits. In 1924 or 1926, the police cordoned off a house in the Bahaddar **Hat** area of Chittagong. Masterda, Ambikada and others were inside the house. They were busy making explosives. The police challenged them, they tried to escape. The police opened fire—they answered back with rifle-bullets and half-made bombs. Then they ran ahead—with the police firing at them from behind. Ambikada slipped and fell into a **nullah**. When he was pulled out of it he was found riddled through and through with bullets. It was difficult to find out whether he was dead

or alive. He recovered later in a Government hospital and was sent up for trial.

His defence was that he was only a passer-by who was shot at by the police. The proof was that when the police had cordoned off the house in Bahaddar Hat—he was somewhere else. The most respected men of Chittagong bore witness to this and gave an alibi. Such was the respect Ambikada and others already had at that time that any decent Chittagonian would help them out of police clutches.

Ambikada was seriously wounded in the battle on Jalalabad Hill after the Chittagong Armoury Raid was over. He had been shot through the head. His comrades left him for dead. He fainted and then later, the cool night breeze slowly brought him back to consciousness. He was still terribly weak, could not move an inch without howling with pain. He himself had grave doubts whether he was still alive—it was highly unlikely, perhaps he had become a ghost? He tried out experiments—moved his hand ever so slowly, touched his forehead and felt an acute pain. Ah! he still had a sense of pain! The pain was real all right and not at all ghostly—maybe he was still alive. Then he tried to pick himself up—ever so cautiously. But then he tumbled down-hill—right into a pond below. He revived after gulping down some water and started walking towards the town. He hobbled along, stopping every now and then for breath.

But the rumour was that Ambika Chakravarty had fallen in action after the Armoury Raid. The townsfolk thought so, and so did we. Then suddenly we heard the news that Ambika had been arrested in Patia village. We were overjoyed and Masterda later told me the whole story.

Some days after he had walked away from Jalalabad Hill, the police surrounded a house next to the one in which Ambikada himself had taken shelter. He went into a pool of weeds next to the house and spent a day and a night under water with only his nose sticking out. He was ill and weak, suffering from loss of blood and with

open bullet wounds. That long dip in the pond made him catch a severe chill and he began to spit blood. Everybody was worried about it—he must have developed pthisis. But Ambikada refused to admit he had any such serious illness. And he could not bear his comrades worrying themselves to death and making a big fuss about it. His prolonged illness had also made him very irritable. It was difficult for anyone to stick it out in his company in the underground shelter. But it was essential to have someone to nurse him. So Phutuda (Tarakeswar Dastidar) was fixed as his nurse—Ambikada and he were great friends.

Fruits were brought for the patient—apples, grapes, etc. But Ambikada was obstinate. He would take the fruits off his own plate and force Phutuda to take them. He was determined to prove that he had not got pthisis. Phutuda would plead with him and sometimes take the fruits into his own plate and then go across to the window later and throw the lot away on the sly. Ambikada would be lying down and would not notice it.

Shortly afterwards, he was arrested and brought to jail. He was still coughing up blood—the jail Doctor said it was pthisis. His trial was postponed. There would be a supplementary case against him—the hearing of the original case had almost been completed. So he was lodged in Suri jail for a while. When his trial was on, I was absconding. I talked about it to Masterda. He said with a great deal of confidence: 'They can't hang Ambika Babu. A man who has cheated death so many times is sure to win again.' That was the general feeling in Chittagong too.

The Special Tribunal sentenced him to death. But the High Court changed it on appeal. The case for the defence was that the man who had been proclaimed as dead by the Government, whose name was not on the list of the 'wanted' after the Armoury Raid and who was generally considered dead by all—could not be punished. The charge-sheet against the Chittagong Armoury Raid accused had not been brought against him—he could not

now be roped in with them. Therefore, the sentence of death was illegal. The High Court commuted the death sentence to one of transportation for life.

Since then, fifteen years of jail life have weakened his health still further. Those who have been released recently say he will not live long unless proper arrangements are made for his treatment. The way things are, it is doubtful whether he can last even for a few months more. Through his amazing will-power and dare-devilry, this veteran revolutionary has cheated death several times. But today he is no longer young and he is waging a losing battle against broken health. It lies in our hands this time—whether he will cheat death once again.

A gigantic, united movement for the release of the revolutionary prisoners will give him courage, delight his great heart and make him hold on grimly against death for the day when we win and he is released after fifteen years in jail.

SAVITRI DEBI

Thirteenth of June, 1932. In a face-to-face battle against Government forces, two of the absconders of the Armoury Raid were killed, while they in their turn killed Capt. Cameron, Commander of the Government forces. The incident took place in the village of Dhalghat in the house of a poor Brahmin. The old man was long dead, only his widow and a son and a married daughter lived in the house. After the incident the widow was arrested together with both the children.

Some time later, I came to learn that the girl had turned a Crown approver, but despite many offers and temptations, not a word could the police get out of the widow and her son. We were filled with respect and esteem for them. Uneducated and poor, how could they resist all the glittering temptation of gold and unflinchingly bear all the tortures that were inflicted upon them? She had the bad reputation of being quarrelsome in her

village. But we could realise what an unbounded love and respect she had for the **Swadeshi** boys and girls to enable her to stand upto such sufferings and tortures. In our eyes, she became a respected lady, a **debi**.

Three months later, I was arrested near the Pahartali Club in male attire, and just a week after my arrest, from the same spot, the Pahartali Club was raided under the leadership of Preeti. After my arrest I was sent to prison.

As I was entering the female ward after crossing the jail gate, a dark-complexioned middle-aged widow came running to me and asked me if I was a **Swadeshi**. Her whole body—her face and her limbs—was disfigured with tumours. Taken aback, I just made a curt 'yes' and followed the **jemadarni** (wardress) into my cell.

But she would not let me go and followed me all along babbling all the time about the police. Warning me against them, she said, "They might torture you, but even then you must never tell them anything, they might even threaten you with hanging, but you must never give way."

The police torture had made her a little demented, but she had never lost her courage and strength of mind—only, her suppressed anger and fury, she used to express in different ways. And she even recited a poem about the ways of the police:

**"The wicked men come politely
And sit close to you;
They extract words by giving threats
And take away your life at the end."**

She was very much ill-treated in jail. But she would be absorbed in her own thoughts and would not take the slightest notice of anything. But whenever anybody came to see me at the office, she never forgot to come and warn me against the tricks of the police. After sometime when I was released on bail, I came to learn that she and her son Ramkrishna had been sentenced to four years' rigorous imprisonment.

A month later I escaped into hiding, and after my capture, was sentenced to life transportation in the Armoury Raid Supplementary Trial. After spending a year and a half in different jails, I found our old Mashima in the Midnapore jail. Even now she would go on repeating her warnings against the police and the jail authorities.

Her old daring, strength and energy had not in the least gone down. She would still fight to the utmost with the jail authorities in demand of anything that she would consider her due. She did not bother very much about the jail rules and regulations. Her demand was that whatever she needed she must be given. Very often, the jail authorities had to give in, for she would listen to nothing. All the punishments that could be given to an old woman in jail, she had borne without a murmur, but had never given up her demands. Of course her demands too were few: sanction of *atap* rice; because in our country, the widows don't take other varieties of rice; fresh vegetables; a post-card to write to relatives or an interview with her son, who was also kept in the same jail.

I have never seen her weeping, only whenever she would speak about Masterda, Nirmalda, Preeti and Ramkrishnada who had stayed in her house and died, tears would come rolling down her eyes.

In prison, her son died of tuberculosis. He was a Division III prisoner, and forced to work in the *Kolu ghani* (mustard oil press). The severity of the work as also the Division III treatment were too much for him and after only two months of galloping T.B., the poor boy died.

For six months, the mother did not get permission to meet her son inspite of repeated requests. The jail authorities gave out false excuses—that her son was punished with solitary confinement for breaking jail regulations, and so could not be permitted an interview. Only a week before his death, she was taken to her son. When the guard came to call her to the office, she was overjoyed as she hopefully thought that now that her

sentence was already over she was going to be transferred to Chittagong jail for her release.

We had no information about her son, but a little later we heard her crying aloud on her way back from office. She told us that her son's condition was grave; the Government was ready to release him provided any relative agreed to stand surety for him. The son asked the mother to send a wire to his uncle, who might come and take him out. He also added that he was sure he would be all right once he was out of prison.

The mother and the son had only 4 annas each, which came to 8 annas but no telegram could be sent for less than 12 annas. The jail authorities themselves would not pay for the telegraph charges, nor would they permit sanctioning it from our money that was deposited in the office. They just gave her a post-card to write to her people, which she did.

No reply came, nor did anybody turn up. Every day Mashima used to go to her son, and daily the son would wistfully ask her if the uncle had arrived. The day before his death he told his mother: "None is likely to come. When I die, there will be nobody to look after you. It will be no use going to the relatives when you are released. Don't you quarrel with others when I die." The next day came the news of his death. This upset her very much. She had plenty of experience in life, but she had never before got the shock of having her own relatives turn away in her adversity.

But in a few days she pulled herself up and taking me aside, told me that after her release, she would go nowhere but remain with the Swadeshi-wallas.

She had an amusing theory about the Swadeshis being honest, religious and trustworthy and that anybody bent upon doing them any harm would suffer many times more. She was confirmed in her theory when one day I informed her that Chittagong's D.I.B., Inspector Jogendra Gupta, had died of T.B.

Jogendra Gupta was notorious for his ill-treatment of political prisoners. There was no end to the tortures

he had inflicted particularly upon those accused of harbouring the revolutionaries at Dhalghat. In jail, I had seen **Mashima** praying to God for the death of all employed in the police, particularly Jogendra Gupta. It was this man who had offered her huge sums of money in return for her giving out all that she knew about the revolutionaries, and it was he who by the offer of money and other temptations turned her daughter into a Crown approver. On hearing of his death, she at once said—"I knew it would come. If you harm the Swadeshis, there is no escaping death by vomiting blood."

She was released a few months after her son's death. While still in jail, I heard that she had gone back to her own village but her relatives had not treated her well and she had been facing untold difficulties to make her living. Somehow she had set up a small hut on her old premises and lived by begging or on the charity of the villagers.

When I came out of jail she came to see me in town and described her condition and asked if she could be given a job so that she might manage at least one meal a day. I could give her no assurance, but only told the comrades in our district that we had to do something for her, for we could by no means forget her past contribution.

She was helped by us from time to time, but whenever I visited her in the village, I heard of the bad treatment she had been receiving from others. I used to feel ashamed and upset at our own indifference to her sufferings.

When a branch of the Nari Samiti was set up at Dhalghat, **Mashima** came and joined it, but the Nari Samiti could not provide for her daily food. Her condition worsened so much that she too had to come for a morsel at the relief kitchen started during the famine. But she would take nothing without earning it, and pledged to work so long as her limbs would carry her. So, she herself took to cooking the food for the hungry crowd that flocked daily.

When the relief kitchen was closed down she came

to the Children's Canteen run by the Nari Samiti at Dhalghat where too she now does the cooking and gets her meals in return.

She supports us in our work. She has no knowledge of Communism. She only knows that we love our people, that we have struggled for the freedom of our country, for the peace and happiness of all. Communism or terrorism conveys no meaning to her, but she is on the side of those who serve the people.

That is how we have again got her back in our midst. Our negligence and our indifference towards her could not drive her away from us. For we see in her the overflowing of the natural patriotism that exists in those who love the people.

SUHASINI GANGULI

In 1929 I got through the Matric exams and came to Calcutta to study in Bethune College. They used to have a 'College Day' every year. Past and present students used to gather together and all felt young and happy and proud of the college.

In the 'College Day' function in that year, I saw Putudi (Suhasini Ganguli) among other strange and new faces. She was tall, strong and impressive, wearing a simple black-bordered sari. I thought she looked like a distinguished political worker. They told me she was Nripen Bannerjee's cousin. Nripen Bannerjee was the Vice-Principal of Chittagong Government College. In the 1921 movement, he had resigned his Government post and was a great name among the Chittagong youth. Besides, he had presided over the political conference held in May 1929 in Chittagong. In a students' debate held along with that conference, he had given me a 'certificate of merit'—although I could not speak very well. So I had specially remembered him. I felt a sense of respect for Putudi right from the start and got to know her at the social.

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Afterwards I met Putudi several times in connection with the work of the girl students' societies. She used to greet me warmly and enquire after my studies, my life in the hostel and in Calcutta in general. I was a stranger in Calcutta, living in a hostel, away from home for the first time. So I used to like her kind interest in the little things of life very much. I used to feel like a younger sister chatting away to a 'didi.'

When the Armoury Raid was over, we were all very very excited. But Putudi was calm as ever—she used to pay occasional visits just as before. There was no visible change in her behaviour. Only, sometimes she would ask about Chittagong, about the revolutionaries there. And she used to keep me cheerful and interested with all kinds of news. I found her well-informed about Chittagong. I used to say to myself,—Putudi does not love me alone but all the Chittagong revolutionaries. I was a bit homesick and would feel she was one of us Chittagong girls.

Then we got the news one morning that Ganesh Ghosh, Loknath Bal, Ananda Gupta and others who were leaders of the raid had been arrested at Chandernagore. Jiban Ghoshal was killed in the fighting with the police before their capture and Sasadhar Acharya and his wife Suhasini Devi were arrested for having given shelter to the revolutionaries.

I was then in Chittagong and heard the rumour that this 'Suhasini Devi' was our Putudi. There was a strong rumour that the Special Branch bosses had tortured Putudi to get information out of her. They had tortured her by shoving needles right under her finger-nails and given her inhuman treatment generally speaking. It was even said that she had been driven out of her mind but still had not given out anything. Then I was told that after two months' torture like this, she was let off when they could get nothing out of her.

In February or March 1931, I had come down to Calcutta in connection with our revolutionary work and ran unexpectedly into Putudi in the 'Ladies' Park' one evening. At first I was taken aback and did not know what



Chittagong 1945.

SAVITRI DEBI

Photo : Sunil Janah



SUHASINI GANGULI

Photo : Sunil Janah

to say. Then I understood that Putudi had come to the park in the hope of seeing me when she heard I was in Calcutta. The 'Ladies' Park' was the place where the girl revolutionaries could talk to each other without raising any suspicions. Then I came out with all the questions on all the points on which I had grave misgivings for I had heard so many rumours about her. My first question was: I am told you had gone out of your mind? I had thought the report about Putudi being Sasadhar Acharya's wife was not true. But I found her wearing vermillion in her hair-parting and an iron bangle—symbols of marriage. So I asked her 'When did you get married? I thought it was all a made-up story.' I was sure of one thing—that she had been cruelly tortured by the police. So I did not ask any questions about that, but only clasped her fingers with their broken finger-nails.

Putudi laughed and said a bit sarcastically, 'Didn't you know I had get married? And who told you the police had tortured me or that I had gone mad?' I got still more confused and unhappy and could not make out what was what. I took some letters for Ganesh Ghosh and others in jail and came away.

In 1933, I was finally sentenced and was sent off to the Hijli Special Jail—set aside for Division II women political workers. I arrived early in the morning and stepping inside the jail gates, I met plenty of old acquaintances among the detenus. I started talking to them in the passage itself. Then Putudi turned up—smiling as of old and informed me that Binadi, Santi and others were waiting for me. (Binadi had been sentenced to nine years for the attempt on Bengal Governor Stanley Jackson's life in the Calcutta University Convocation. And Santi had been sentenced to transportation for life in the Comilla Murder case. Both of them were in Hijli at that time and Putudi was also made a detenu in 1931).

Putudi briefly explained the set-up inside the jail to me: mutual relations of the detenus among themselves and their relations with the convicts, what they thought of each other, etc. She added, 'You are a new-comer and

might face some difficulties, that is why I explained the whole thing to you. I don't want you to get mixed up with the various groupings here. Think it over coolly and decide for yourself what you want to do. You will have to preserve the great good name of Chittagong.' I had heard from Putudi and Indudi (Ananta Singh's sister) that Anantada, Ganeshda and the entire Chittagong group of revolutionaries had earned the respect of all by their personal and political conduct in jail too.

Putudi was like a 'didi', an elder sister, to us all. She used to look after our health and our comforts with the utmost care. We too, who were young and quite irresponsible at the time and homesick too would pester her with all our complaints and demands. Putudi would put up with all our antics cheerfully and say, "If you young girls went about with long faces and kept to yourselves, we would feel very lonely."

I used to take every opportunity to get Putudi to tell us stories of her underground life. She used to tell us how Ganeshda and others used to live and work in their Chandernagore hide-out, how they got caught. She would speak also of the food she used to cook for them. She said one day, 'whenever we have mutton to eat here in Hijli, I don't feel like taking it. I am reminded of one of the comrades in our Chandernagore shelter. Just before we were arrested, he wanted to have a feast with mutton one day. It was nearing the end of the month, so I told him to hold on till I got the next month's allowance. But we got caught at the end of the month, and I never had the chance to keep my promise'. The comrade who had asked for mutton was Jiban Ghoshal who was killed in the police raid on their hide-out.

Putudi was a great blessing to us all in the camp. Listening to her, one would feel she was talking about her brothers and sisters with the deep love and sympathy of a wise, patient, worldly-wise elder sister. But even in Hijli, I could not get her to open up about herself. She never liked to discuss her own problems but believed in facing them herself and solving them. Only when some-

body would insist on talking of her reported marriage, she would tell me, "Why are you naive, Kalpana? Mustn't I behave like a married woman having said that I am married?"

I was together with Putudi only for three months—then I was taken away to Rajshahi jail.

I met her again after my release in 1939. She had been released a year earlier and was the same as ever. She had become a teacher in a school maintained by the Corporation. She was looking after her aged mother and sister.

Some of the ex-terrorist lads would come and tell me, 'We are sure you will join our ranks again as before'. Others would say 'Do you know Ananta and Ganesh have the same opinions as before? Only two or three of the Chittagong group have mutinied and turned Communist and have been turned out by Ananta. We hope you will stand by the Chittagong group and come with us.' One of them said, 'What a shame you have not yet been able to decide which group you will join? What did you do for six years in jail?' But then I also heard Anantada himself had turned Communist: 'Ananta Singh and his colleagues too are said to have turned Communist, although they have not sent word in writing. But I am sure you would join us all the same'.

I told them all, 'let me start work—you will see for yourself what kind of work I do and with whom I work'. But I was very worried: who could be the members of the 'Chittagong group' who have 'mutinied' against Ananta Singh? And then Anantada himself has turned Communist—although he has not sent word in writing! And why such a fuss about 'what party' I was going to join? Such problems had never occurred to me in jail at all—all I knew was that I had to start work again with fresh enthusiasm when out and work more carefully and much harder.

Once again, it was Putudi who came to my rescue. She said, 'All sorts of people will try to drag you into their party squabbles, by telling you all sorts of things. Ananta

Singh and others have come to believe in Communism. No one has 'mutinied.' The best thing for you is to see things for yourself, study and then make up your own mind. Jhumku will give you all the news about Ananta and the rest.' Jhumku is my cousin—he was sentenced to life transportation in the Armoury Raid. But he was very young and was released together with two others in 1938.

Then I went back to Chittagong and started work with the Communist Party. Putudi had to devote a lot of her time to family affairs, so she could not join the Party. As an honoured friend of the Party she helped it all she could. When we first turned to Communism, most of us got bottled up among a small circle of fellow-workers. But Putudi kept close and friendly relations with all sorts of people all along. She kept friendly relations with members of all political groups. After August 1942, she was arrested again when the police searched her house and found a letter from a Congress worker.

Putudi has come out after three years. The devastating changes that have taken place in the life of Chittagong in these years cannot be understood without seeing them. There is widespread despondency, rules of social behaviour have been flouted, women from all sections are leading a life of shame. The misery and degradation of Chittagong womanhood is bound to touch Putudi's great heart. The nobility and dignity of her soul, her immense kindness and her calmness which defies all worries will be a tremendous asset to us in our fight to restore Chittagong to its former greatness.

PREETI WADDADAR

The Pahartali Railways Officers' Club is near the railway station. British officers and their wives used to come for drinks and dancing every Saturday night.

24th September, 1932, was one such Saturday. The music, laughter and revelry came to a dead stop suddenly about 9 o'clock in the night. Instead there was the sound

of bombs exploding and shots being fired. Those inside tried to get out by the windows, but then rushed back again in panic. Within a quarter of an hour, it was all over—there was silence. Only the wounded groaned in pain and fear.

Eight boys made the attack under Preeti's leadership. All the boys went back unhurt—but Preeti never came back. She took potassium cyanide and collapsed—dead—about 10 yards from the club-house. A splinter wound on her breast had soaked her shirt in blood.

Plenty of men had mounted the gallows, had been killed in action in the struggle of the terrorist revolutionaries. But Preeti was the first woman known to have been in action and to have died in action. In 1930, some girls had joined the movement, but were not then known to have gone into serious action.

From Preeti's actions, people were convinced for the first time that Indian women can do what our men have done. They can give their lives for their country as easily as men can. Whatever criticism there may be of the methods of the terrorists, all Chittagong remembers Preeti as their brave daughter. They say with deep reverence "She did not give herself to the Police."

I was in jail then. I had been arrested a week before Preeti went into action. The police were at their wit's end—they could not make out why I was seen going towards Pahartali dressed in male attire. They were highly suspicious over the 'circumstances' of my arrest, but could not bring any definite charge against me.

On the morning of the 25th of September the D.I.B. Inspector came to see me. He started off at once, "God, we saved you in the nick of time!" A little later, another official came and said, "It is our great good fortune to have saved a girl like you from death." What were they driving at?—the suspense made me crazy with impatience. The D.I.B. Inspector came out with it finally. "Preeti died yesterday," he said, "she raided Pahartali Club and then took potassium cyanide. Thank God, we arrested you—or you would have gone the same way."

Preeti was dressed exactly as you were." He went on talking and seemed to be well-meaning in his own way.

But I could not stand his chatter any more, I came to my cell. Preeti was a very dear friend of mine. Of the four girls who had joined Surjya Sen's party only two of us had been left. The rest had gone.

The night before my arrest, I got the news that we were to go into action together. I was asked to come away from home for action—so that I don't have to go back home again. Preeti had been absconding for a month and a half—this was our first meeting after she went underground.

We went to the sea beach and did some target practice. Then we sang songs and came away. 'Phutuda', who was our leader, told me that I would have to return home once more before going into action. He said the finishing touches to preparations for the raid would take some time yet, there would be suspicion if I did not return. There was still a restraint order on me.

Preeti backed him and I got very annoyed with her. I was sure I would get caught and not be able to go into action if I went home. For some time the D.I.B. Inspector had been coming daily to our house to keep watch. He would have noticed my disappearance already and was bound to run me in for breaking the restraint order. It was decided in the end that if I noticed any danger, I was to come back at once. I was also given a revolver, just in case they tried to arrest me, I could shoot my way out. Preeti saw me off with a patronising, "Now don't be childish" advice.

She was only two years older than I and we were both very young then. I was furious with her for trying to play the big sister.

On the morning of the 17th of September I saw the police on our verandah as soon as I sighted our house. I turned back at once, but was caught trying to get to Preeti's shelter that very night. I was mad with Preeti. She was my best friend, if she had put in a word, may be I would not have got trapped like this.

For seven days I was brooding over my bad luck and just could not forgive Preeti for letting me down. And now.....the sudden, impossible news that she was dead! If only I were by her side, in action together, I would never have let her commit suicide.

Later on, Masterda (Surjya Sen) told me that she had died in order to show our people that women too can fight and die for their country like their men-folk. But I was convinced that she could have done much more by coming back alive.

I got to know her when both of us were very young. We went to school together—she was only a class ahead of me in the same school. We got to know each other on the badminton courts. The rules were that you got the right to play on the badminton courts and to take books out of the library as soon as you reached class V. But we had to give up the courts to girls from the senior classes when they wanted it! That is why I used to play in the burning sun, during the tiffin recess. And Preeti was the only one who would play at that hour. So we became best friends.

When we got to the senior classes both of us joined the Girl Guides. We used to tell each other that it was our duty to learn all the methods of the 'other side', (the British). It would be useful to us for building up our own strength. We wanted to get the pledge "To be loyal to God and the King Emperor" changed into "To be loyal to God and Country."

Preeti used to tell us that in her family, they had the true Indian way of life—they all used swadeshi goods. I used to feel very small, because our family was rather loyalist in trend then—right from the use of foreign cloth downwards.

But we had no clear idea in our school days about our future. Sometimes we used to dream of becoming great scientists. Then the Rani of Jhansi fired our imagination with her example. Sometimes, we used to think of ourselves as fearless revolutionaries. We made up our mind several times that we would win the "Premchand-Rai-

chand" scholarship from the Calcutta University (the highest scholarship for foreign studies available in Bengal).

But Preeti used to say also that if she did not get a scholarship in her Matric, she would not be able to go to Calcutta University for further studies. It would cost too much—her's was a poor family. We both felt sad discussing this, because she was very keen on going to the Calcutta University which was the 'pride of the East' at that time.

She was very good at her studies, but weak in mathematics. So she missed her scholarship and had to go to Dacca University.

Next year, I too got through my Matric and went to Calcutta for further studies. I joined Girl Students' Societies and began to get training in lathi and sword-play at the gymnasium. She too had joined the patriotic "Deepali Sangh" at Dacca and taken up lathi and sword-play.

In our vacations we two and two other girls got in touch with Chittagong revolutionaries. Preeti did not trust the others too much—although they were her friends at school. She used to say, "I am afraid they will desert—they are soft." She hated the slightest touch of cowardice.

I recall one particular incident. All Chittagong schools and colleges were to go on strike against some circulars sent out by the Director of Public Instruction. Both of us were home on vacation. All four of us girls picketted at the Khastagir School gates. The school authorities banned our going to the school. The two other girls managed somehow to get the ban lifted for them. Preeti used to say "They must have apologised because we did not do wrong."

In May 1932, Preeti had gone to see Masterda in a village in Dhalghat. At dusk, a police force led by Captain Cameron surrounded the house. Cameron opened fire with machine guns. Our side also fired back with revolvers. Preeti had never been in action before. But within a few



PREETI WADDADAR



PREETI'S FATHER AND MOTHER
Chittagong 1943. Photo : Sunil Janah

minutes she had sized up the situation and began firing herself. Cameron was shot dead and Nirmalda was fatally wounded. Cameron's force was confused for a while. The order came—"Escape!"

The same Preeti who had been in the thick of the shooting suddenly became softened and could not tear herself away from a wounded comrade.

Preeti was fearless in face of danger, but did not like other people to get into danger on her account.

Preeti got away from the Cameron shooting incident. Her clothes were found in the house. But the police did not suspect her, although she came back home. They could not dream of this quiet girl being mixed up with the revolutionaries.

Masterda sent word that she had to be kept safe in the town. When she left home, the police kept a sharper watch on me. Discipline in my home also was tightened up. So Preeti decided to go back home. She told me, "Kalpana, I don't want you to get arrested because of me. I'll go home and make other arrangements for my safety."

Masterda of course, made other arrangements for her and she went underground. On the 5th of July, the D.I.B. Inspector went to arrest her and found she had disappeared. He came to our house to tighten the grip on me and said, "She is such a quiet girl, speaks so well, I could not imagine she had so much in her. She has outwitted us all right."

But that was not the only occasion on which she tricked them. In Calcutta, under a false name, she had had any number of interviews with Ramkrishna Biswas, a revolutionary who was hanged. No one recognised her, she was never caught, no one could imagine it was she. Ramkrishna Biswas was absconding after the Armoury Raid and had been sentenced to death in the Chandpur Murder Case. He was in Alipore Central Jail in Calcutta. Preeti had 40 interviews with him. Not even the Superintendent of the hostel she was staying in, had any idea of her activities. The police got to know only after they discovered

an article on Ramkrishna Biswas written by her in Dhalghat.

After Ramkrishna's hanging, Preeti was very anxious to go into action. Then she came in contact with Masterda. She got another blow when Nirmalda died at Dhalghat. Sometimes, Masterda used to say she might have thought of suicide because of the death of these two very dear comrades of hers. Masterda used to say, "I don't believe in suicide. But she forced potassium cyanide out of me when she came to bid her last farewell. She was so eager and argued so well about its need in case she was trapped. I could not hold out. I gave it to her."

A tiny incident—not big in itself—brings out Preeti's extremely gentle character. During the Puja holidays in 1930, she had asked me to go to their place for a feast. We were discussing whether either of us could slaughter a goat for the mutton. I said, "Of course, I can! There is nothing much in it." Preeti said, "There is nothing frightening in it, of course, but I won't be able to slaughter a poor inoffensive creature in cold blood." Somebody asked at once, "What? Do you want to fight for the country's freedom too non-violently or what?" I remember her straight reply, "When I am ready to give my own life for the country's freedom I won't hesitate a bit in taking somebody's life too if necessary. But I shall not be able to kill a poor harmless creature just like that." Within two years, she proved by her own death that she believed in what she said then.

Preeti's family were never well off. Her father was a clerk in the Municipal offices and was barely able to balance the family budget. He handed over his monthly salary to Preeti and she had the key to the cash box. One afternoon, we were discussing the problem of funds, sitting at her place. Masterda needed Rs. 500 urgently on that very day. Rs. 450 had been collected, the balance of Rs. 50 was wanted. She had not been asked to give anything because we all knew their family finances were bad. Preeti quietly walked out of the room while the discussion

was going on and slipped back with Rs. 50. When she was asked where she got it from, she answered "Yesterday Father got his salary. All the cash is kept with me, so I am giving the whole amount." We protested for two reasons: firstly, she would be left with no ready cash at all if we took it, secondly she would be causing misunderstanding and panic in the house when anybody asked for the cash and got nothing. Preeti would not agree. She said, "I run this household, I shall manage on my own. Please don't waste your time worrying about it." She added, "And of course there will be no problem at all about my having the cash. Father has implicit faith in me. Besides, I will tell him myself that I have spent the money—he will know I cannot spend it on any but a good cause which makes our sacrifice more than worth while." But when nobody would agree to take the money she almost burst into tears "you won't take our money just because we are poor? Won't you give me the chance to prove our devotion to the cause even?"

Preeti was not only good at her studies. She could write very well too. People used to quote what she wrote in her underground days.

Her father gave her a good education even though he could not afford it, because of her striking intelligence. He used to tell her, "My hopes are bound up with you." She too, was very fond of her father. Her face would light up when she spoke of him.

He lost his job just before she went up for her B.A. exams. So she had to maintain the family out of her own earnings. She became a teacher in a high school and was tutor to some girls. In this way she maintained her father, mother and four little brothers and sisters. She knew what a shock her death would be to so many who loved her so much. But she gave her life for the hundreds and thousands of mothers and fathers of our country who need a daughter. She was daughter to them all.

Her father nearly lost his reason over her death. But her mother used to say proudly, "My girl has given her life for the country." They had a very, very hard time

after she went away. But the mother took up midwifery and managed to balance the family budget somehow.

They are still carrying on somehow, Preeti's father has not been able to forget his sorrow. He is reminded of her whenever he sees me. He took keen interest in relief work during the famine and used to say "My girl would have helped us to do so much more."

People of Chittagong have not forgotten Preeti or her great sacrifice. They point out her father to any stranger and say "He is the father of the first girl who gave her life for our country".

MANI DUTT

June 1932. A posse of police, personally led by Captain Cameron, had cordoned off a group of absconders in Dhalghat. Two from our side—Nirmalda and Apurba—were killed. 'Masterda' (Surjya Sen) and Preeti Waddadar broke through the police cordon and escaped. Preeti had got back to her own home all right—but her future was a problem. It was not known whether the police knew for certain that Preeti was in the Dhalghat affair. Her staying at home meant the police were sure of her whereabouts. But was it wise to let her stay at home when the police grip was tightening all round? On the other hand would it be correct to ask her to go underground?

Preeti and I used to spend hours in her own room, weighing up possibilities, trying to make future plans. We thought the only way out was for Preeti to go underground. So I was trying to fix up with her how she was to manage it. We were cut off from our associates at that time and the two of us together had taken the decision. But then, all of a sudden, Preeti's little sister came and informed us that somebody had come to see her. We went round to an old ramshackle shed next to Preeti's room to do the talking there on the quiet.

The stranger was dark and tall. He came to the point straight. "Masterda has sent me" he said, "to find out

how things are with you. When he knows how things stand with you (Preeti), he will decide what arrangements to make for your safety." We explained what we were thinking. He listened and got up to leave as soon as we had finished—without saying a word. I told him as I saw him off: "Tell Masterda to fix up for me to meet him on an urgent matter." After the Dhalghat affair some of our people were rounded up and all means of contacting Masterda had broken down for ten or twelve days. So it was very necessary to make quick arrangements for regular contact. But the stranger did not so much as say 'yes' or 'no'—in fact, we could not tell whether he had even heard our message or understood it! He just looked at me once and then turned on his heels and walked off.

I remember feeling very puzzled. His behaviour was strange to say the least. He did not seem to be thick-headed at all, but smart and intelligent. But never yet had I ever spoken to a soul without getting an answer. I began to worry—had I offended him in any way? When I told Preeti about it, she said: "Oh! He is like that—talks very little anyway, and Nirmalda and Apurba's death has shaken him up very much."

Five months after this incident, I too went underground. So far, in the course of my normal work, before going underground, I had only come to know one comrade, Santida. I had not tried to find out about anybody else. "Know only those you must"—is a golden rule in revolutionary work. Excessive curiosity is never encouraged. So I did not know anybody else.

I was staying at a shelter in Saroatali village, with Masterda and 'Phutuda' (Tarakeswar Dastidar). Phutuda said, "Today we shall all go to a party where we shall meet all the principal revolutionaries. Absconders who are scattered all over will also turn up. Masterda will give us directions for future work and also where underground workers are going to be and how they are to be grouped together."

"Zemindar will be there" he went on, "and Talwarkar (literally, sword-maker) and yes, Lecturer too—you know

him." I could not spot 'Lecturer' at all, but I did not think it proper to ask. I knew these were all assumed names. I knew Masterda named people after some striking quality of theirs or after some particular incident they were closely linked with. But for the life of me, I could not think of anyone I knew who talked too much and would deserve to be called 'Lecturer.'

Anyhow we went along to the party. Some twenty-five to twenty-six boys were present. I saw that silent stranger I had met at Preeti's place seated right in front of me. He smiled and greeted me. I whispered to Phutuda who was sitting next to me, "I know this comrade—by face and not by name." Phutuda answered back, "Oh! That is Lecturer—remember I told you of him?"

I was surprised. How can a man who does not talk at all be named 'Lecturer'. Then Phutuda told me his story.

'Lecturer' was the first boy in the tenth (final) class in Saroatali High School. All the best students in Chittagong always joined the revolutionaries—the Party used to keep an eye on them. One of the boys soon reported that this boy was keen on meeting Masterda. So the time and place for the meeting was fixed up. Phutuda met the boy at the edge of a dense grove of cactus trees. Phutuda was talking to him and behind a wall of trees, Masterda was waiting and listening to the conversation. Phutuda was asking him why he wanted to do revolutionary work, what he understood by it, how far he was prepared to go in self-sacrifice, why he was anxious to meet Masterda, etc.

The boy began to answer—but not in straight, ordinary language but by quoting Sanskrit slokas, through Bengali and English verses and by using high-flown, literary Bengali. He was talking to a great 'leader', was he not? If he talked in ordinary language, would it not show that he was wanting in respect? Besides, this was the supreme moment of his life—only the best piece of prose and verse that he knew could express the depth of his feeling at that moment. He was a good student and knew prose and verse pieces by heart.

Meanwhile, Masterda was splitting his sides laughing—at the other side of the grove. When Phutuda had finished his talk, Masterda said “He is a real Lecturer, I see.” Ever since that day, he was called ‘Lecturer.’

The ‘Lecturers’ parents were very poor. His real name was Mani Dutt and he came from Kashiash village. His parents were proud of their studious son and hoped their sorrows would end when the son grew up and took on a job. In fact, neither Masterda nor Phutuda could imagine how utterly poor the family was until they went to the ‘Lecturer’s’ home one day.

The ‘Lecturer’ was so insistent in his plea that Masterda should go to their home that he went there one rainy night. There was only one room and the roof was leaking. The kitchen-room was worse still—with the rain dripping through the broken-down roof. The whole family stayed huddled together in one corner of the kitchen all night. They made Masterda pass the night in the living-room and gave him their only blanket. They felt proud and honoured for having given shelter to Masterda. In fact, their humble cottage became one of the safest shelters for future use by Masterda.

After the ‘Pahartali’ raid, the ‘Lecturer’ also left school and became an absconder. It was a hard wrench in the heart for him to give up his dreams of a brilliant academic record. But no one ever heard him regret it. Occasionally, snatches of gossip here and there revealed his deep love for his dear parents. That was all.

This is the account Phutuda gave of the ‘Lecturer’ and ended up by saying, “We call him the Lecturer, but he does not use bookish language anymore.”

After that first meeting, I got to know him well in the course of our work. He had a very deep sense of humanity and used to say of himself: “If I had not become a revolutionary, I would have become a *sadhu* (ascetic). I just can’t stand seeing people suffer. Phutuda has helped me to take the revolutionary path, that is why I love him so much.” What he said was true. There used to be tears in his eyes when he heard of anybody’s sufferings.

It was this which gave him a superhuman calm and amazing resourcefulness in the face of danger. My acquaintance with him in action in the midst of extreme danger, literally makes me feel like falling at his feet in reverence. I remember vividly his doings on that day in February 1934 at Goirola village, when Masterda was caught by the police. The 'Lecturer' was with us on that day.

It was 9-30 in the night. We were going after meals to keep an appointment. But the police had already surrounded the house we had come out of and, getting suspicious, they opened fire at us. We turned back in the opposite direction and jumped over the fence into a garden-house. I ran fast and drew level with Masterda. It was pitch dark and very cold. I was edging along cautiously, feeling every step, holding Masterda firmly by the hand—when, suddenly, I slipped into a pond upto the neck in the water. I could hear there was someone else in the water too. He came closer, hearing the splash I made, and said "Is it Masterda? Come along this way." When I told him it was I, he said, "Oh! Then come, hold on to me and we'll get out of here." Rifle bullets were whizzing past—over our heads, almost flicking our ears. I could feel the heat and the draught. It seemed almost impossible not to get killed and not even to get a scratch. But the 'Lecturer' was calm as a statue, all he said was. "We must get out of this pond." The banks sloped up steeply. After scrambling up for a while, we got out.

Then he said, "We must take shelter behind those bushes—or we shall be riddled with bullets." But it was clear in a moment that the bamboo bushes would not protect us from the rifle bullets. The 'Lecturer' gave the order. "Lie flat on the ground." Lying flat, we could see dark figures barely ten or twelve feet from us—moving up relentlessly towards us. What was to be done? We did not have much ammunition left either.

The 'Lecturer' was ready in a minute with his plan, "You fire on one side—I on the other. If we both fire together, our ammunition won't last long." I carried out



MANI DUTT (1945)



KALPANA DUTT (1932)

his orders in silence. The police firing stopped for a moment—this was the time to make a dash for safety. But as soon as we went near the tank in the garden-house, signalling-fire started, giving away our movements. The 'Lecturer' said once again. "We must dive into the tank and stay under water. Keep only your nose above water and breathe through the mouth—or the soldiers on the other side will hear our breathing." We could hear the soldiers breathing heavily on the other side of the tank.

After being in the water for over an hour we were making a final effort to escape. As we got on to the bank, the 'Lecturer' warned me again to be careful, "Don't lift up your head. We have to crawl along lying flat on the ground. We'll run for it as soon as we pass the danger zone." He threw away the empty cartridges and loaded the revolvers afresh. Then he showed me how to crawl along on the ground. Incidentally, I found out later, that he had never been taught to crawl as a military exercise, but worked out an excellent system under stress of necessity from sheer commonsense. I had started revolutionary work earlier than he, but from where, I asked myself, had he acquired such amazing resourcefulness and such robust commonsense?

It took us an hour to get out of the cordon of armed police—but the 'Lecturer' led the way to safety. As soon as he got out of the danger zone—his deadly calm and iron will began to go and I was left with a comrade who was aggrieved beyond words and worried to death. He said, "I have left Masterda behind surrounded by soldiers. Please wait here, I'll go and fetch him."

This time, I had to do the job of explaining to him the dangers and pleading with him. After a while he said, "I have a duty towards you too. You are a girl and besides, you don't know the ins and outs of this village. If I don't reach you to a safe place, all this trouble to get you out of the danger zone would be useless." He himself did not know the lay-out of that village either. But after groping our way for a time we finally got away.

But the news of the capture of Masterda and other wounded comrades made the 'Lecturer' still more miserable. He began to feel he was the guilty one who had failed to manage their rescue. Ever since that day, whenever there was any talk among us about Masterda, he would say, "All of us came through all right. But we could not save the one who had to be saved."

Nobody has ever known the 'Lecturer' lose his nerve in the face of danger.

On another occasion, the 'Lecturer,' myself and another comrade had to come to town when we were underground. We were all unrecognisable—dressed in Muslim style, with lungyi and punjabi. We were waiting on the banks of a pool at dusk. Some cart-drivers came up to us, made straight for me and started questioning me. We suspected that the boy who was to meet us there had turned traitor. Otherwise why should they pick on me of all the three for questioning? It was a winter evening and we had all wrapped ourselves up in shawls from head to foot. I had wrapped a pugri round my head to hide my hair, but it could not be made out through the shawl.

The 'Lecturer' at once made up his mind on the line of action. He challenged them and he started going at them with both fists. He held them at bay and asked us to run for it. It was awkward, we had to run down the main street with a torch in one hand and a revolver in the other. Meanwhile, the cart-drivers started shouting, "Thief! thief!" After we had got a good start on them, the 'Lecturer' let them go and sprinted to join us and started yelling, "Thief! thief!" himself. At this, people thought the 'thieves' were ahead of us and tried to run further ahead and we were beyond suspicion ourselves. In the confusion, we struck down an alley and were safe.

He is a six footer, is the 'Lecturer,' but he looks so quiet and harmless that I could not imagine he could be so violent. But on that day he held five or six hefty coachmen at bay single-handed.

Almost all through my underground life, the 'Lec-

turer' was with me. But as the police watch tightened, we began to scatter more and more, so that if one got caught the entire machine would not be in danger. That is why when I got caught, the 'Lecturer' was elsewhere and escaped.

In 1934, when I was in Rajshahi jail, I heard Mani Dutt had been sentenced to ten years under the Arms Act after being taken while trying to break through a police cordon.

Now, after nearly eleven years, he is among us again. In the old Chittagong we used to say there is nothing this young revolutionary cannot do. But the job today is much bigger and the hurdles on the way are many more. Our old Chittagong is no more. Our entire Chittagong society is vastly changed. A deep patriotism had seized the entire Chittagong youth. And on that rock-like foundation the revolutionaries had built their gigantic plans for freedom, based on social justice. But today corrupt and anti-social elements have tainted the incorruptible people of Chittagong.

The Communist Party is today battling against the heaviest odds to cut a clean path for our youth through this mire of corruption. With Mani Dutt's release, it will not merely be a case of the Communist Party getting back an invaluable fighter. It will mean a bridge between the glorious past of Chittagong and the heroic future, which we are all trying to build, across the decline of the present.

SWADESH ROY

He was not formally a member of the Chittagong revolutionary organisation. He was a contractor, working under an overseer of the P.W.D. in housing construction schemes. He was not very old either, only 22 or 23.

From 1928 onwards, Ananta Singh and others had started building up their revolutionary group. To carry out their revolutionary programme they had begun to gather facts about the lay-out of the whole of Chittagong.

gong—its main landmarks, the main concentration of British authority. About this time they got in touch with Swadesh Roy as a sympathiser. He was a building contractor and was very helpful in mapping out the whole place for them.

But Swadesh Roy did not consider himself to be a mere sympathiser but an active participant in the revolutionary movement. On his own initiative he would sometimes give Anantada plans and schemes which were valuable.

A few days before the Armoury Raid he gathered that something big was afoot from the way the revolutionaries he knew were moving about in those days. But since he had not been told anything about it, he did not ask any questions.

On the night of 18th April, a batch of six or seven revolutionaries were speeding ahead in a car towards the hill, on which the Armoury stood. Not far from the Armoury itself, they came to a halt.

Swadesh Roy lived not far from the Armoury. So when he saw the car had stopped, he came out to see what was the matter. Some of the boys had got off the car and were trying to get it started again by pushing it. Even then, Swadesh Roy did not ask: "What is up? Where are you going?" After all, Anantada and his associates often went about in cars on exercises and they wore khaki too on such occasions. Besides it was against the rules to ask any questions when you had not been told.

Suddenly, a revolver slipped out and fell to the ground when one of the boys was pushing the car for all he was worth. The boy picked it up quickly and tucked it away again into his belt—but Swadesh Roy noticed it all right and said nothing.

The car got started at last and Swadesh went back home. Shortly afterwards, he heard shots fired around the Armoury and heard the roar 'Bande Mataram' shouted in many different voices.

In a flash, Swadesh got the whole thing straight. What everybody was waiting for had come at last. That

must be Anantada and his comrades in action. He pieced together the whole story. He remembered that revolver dropping out when they were pushing the car. The revolutionaries had walked about the city streets before in uniform, of course, but they had strict instructions never to carry arms while in uniform, because the uniform made them conspicuous and liable to being searched by the police. All the members knew this strict rule. And yet, today he had seen that revolver. The time must have come for carrying out their plans—they must be in action today.

He was thrilled and excited. Wearing only his dhoti and a banyan, he rushed ahead towards the Armoury. The charts and plans he had drawn for Anantada were being used this very minute! He could not keep himself away.

When he reached the foot of the hill on which the Armoury was situated, he heard a challenge from above: "Halt". He stopped and a torchlight was flashed on his face from above for identification. They asked him his name. He answered, "This is Swadesh Roy. You have not asked me to report. But I came when I heard the shots and 'Bande Mataram'". That was enough. Ganeshda (Ganesh Ghosh) at once stepped down and embraced the newcomer.

The revolutionary leader had no idea that this loyal friend of theirs would be ready to even risk his life for the cause. They knew he was in business, a good contractor, able to provide valuable information—but they had not thought he was capable of sacrificing everything for the cause.

From that day, he became one of the participants in the struggle. He took part in the Jalalabad Battle with the British forces on the hills beyond Chittagong.

When they retreated from the hill under cover of darkness, Surjya Sen gave the order: those who want to go back home, or can take shelter with faithful friends, are free to go. And those who are prepared to put up

with all the hardships of underground life, face all dangers—they alone are to stick on.

Some went away. The sight of death at close quarters on Jalalabad Hill, the blood-smeared faces and bodies of 11 or 12 comrades who had been riddled with bullets—had made them falter. To die oneself is easy, but to see your closest friends die right under your eyes and then to leave their bodies behind, unhonoured—is not so easy. Some—a few—went home. But the others said, "No, we cannot leave our friends behind and seek safe shelters. Besides, we must avenge those who died." Swadesh was one of them. He could easily have gone back. The police would not suspect one who was in business and had a stake in peaceful living. But Swadesh refused to go—refused point-blank.

Swadesh became an absconder. But after some time, he felt suffocated. How long can one carry on like this, sitting in hiding, doing nothing? The voice of the dead comrades seemed to call out: 'No more delay'. With Mastoida's (Surjya Sen's) permission six of them set out towards the town—Swadesh, Debu, Monoranjan, Rajat, Subodh and Manindra. Their aim was to make an attack on the European quarters on the bank of the river, at the Balantyne Ghat in Chittagong town.

Because they had received inaccurate information and consequently made plans which could not be carried out—the attack did not come off. But when they were marching down along the river bank and were thinking of going into Rajat's house, they came face to face with goondas of Feringhee Bazar. They had had several skirmishes with these goondas before. So far, the goondas were afraid of the revolutionaries. But now they were out for revenge.

The goondas informed the police, who arrived on the scene shortly. The revolutionaries were then near Rajat's house but it was obviously impossible to get in there. Nor was it any easier to get away along the river—the boatmen were nowhere in sight. But they jumped into a boat and started making a dash across the river—

which was narrow at that particular spot. The goondas and the police also took over a 'sampan' (Village craft) and gave chase. They shouted out across the river, trying to gather a crowd.

Swadesh and his friends got across to the other bank and started out towards Kalarpole. But hearing shouts, a gang of local goondas tried to stop the revolutionaries who were rushing towards them, chased by the police and the Feringhee Bazar goondas. The revolutionaries tried hard to explain that they were fighting for freedom and were chased by the police. But the local goondas would not give way—so one of them had to be shot to clear the way.

They did not get very far, however. Armed police from a police station nearby came and blocked their way forward. From behind, too, the police and the goondas caught up on them.

There was no other go but to fight. It was the 6th of May, 1930. There were open fields in front—stretching right up to the horizon. Only the low **bundhs** made of mud to hold the water in the fields could give some sort of a cover. So the six lay down flat and opened fire under cover of the mud-walls.

They could not keep it up for long. They had ammunition to last only three rounds. Besides, their revolvers did not have much of a chance against rifles in a pitched battle.

When the shooting stopped, the British forces crossed over to arrest the revolutionaries. But they found all six bodies riddled with bullets. Swadesh, Rajat, Manoranjan were dead. Debu was breathing his last. Manindra and Subodh were mortally hurt.

When Masterda heard the whole story, he paid his tribute to the revolutionaries and said in wonder: "We underrated Swadesh—we did not know what splendid stuff he was made of."

All this happened only 15 years ago. Even in those days, to rebuild this Chittagong town in the hilly region on Bengal's eastern borders as a modern town, good peo-

ple worked as contractors. Swadesh was such a contractor, who gave his life for his country and his people.

But today, the Chittagong contractors have made the whole of society victims of their greed and envy. They take a special delight in humiliating our men and women. They trade in women, cringe before the army—every act of theirs offends our self-respect.

The contractor Swadesh was respected and loved by all. Today's contractors get only people's curses. Common folk turn their faces the other way when a contractor passes by and say, "the vampires!"

SANTI CHAKRAVARTY

Santi Chakraverty was born in a Brahmin family on the outskirts of Chittagong, just near the sea-shore.

His father, being a **Purohit** (priest), wanted his son to follow the family profession. But Santida had ideas of his own. He wanted to learn something else besides the religious **mantrams**. So he went to school. There he came in contact with a terrorist **dada** (group leader). Physical culture used to be one of the means that the terrorist leaders employed to get new recruits for the Party. In Santida the **dada** found not only a boy of outstanding physical strength but a very good organiser too.

He was put in charge of one of the schools. The result was no other rival terrorist group could make recruits from the school in which he studied. The boys clung to him and he himself became a good **dada** to them.

Thence his sphere of work extended. On his own initiative, he opened several physical culture clubs in different centres. Acting the instructor he himself recruited many into the Party. His virtues found expression in his recruits. They were all good riders, strong and healthy, and serious enough to sacrifice their all for the sake of the country. He gave up his studies before he matriculated and devoted himself wholly to terrorist activities.

I came to know him in 1932. He used to act as my

escort leading me to the place where our underground *dadas* were hiding. At that time I did not know his name and was not supposed to make any personal inquiries. He himself was so unassuming that he spoke very little about himself. But I soon found out for myself that our leaders relied on him for everything they wanted to get done. He would arrange shelters, dumps, etc., make explosives, examine the arms and keep them in order, do the counter-espionage work—he could easily get into the confidence of other political groups, and ferret out their secrets. “There is nothing in the world that could not be done by him”—this was what I often heard Masterda (Surjya Sen) say.

When I became an absconder in December 1932 I got more opportunities to know him better. There was curfew order in Chittagong. Yet we had to move only at night.

Santida, along with one more comrade was hurrying towards a safe dumping place as the night was drawing to a close. He did not know that the way through which they would pass was already cordoned in by the military. They were challenged and arrested on the spot. With illegal fire-arms on his person, and in charge of some absconders, billeted for the night somewhere else and waiting for him, how could he reconcile himself to his arrest?

He asked the soldiers if he could attend a call of nature. They untied him, little knowing what a dare-devil they were letting loose. The soldiers pointed to a spot, some yards off, he quietly walked upto it and then began running for all he was worth, the soldiers firing after him madly. After a few hours he was safely back in our midst with scratches all over his body and he remained with us, the absconders. After this escapade he could not go back to a legal existence.

This is only one story about him. His self-sacrificing nature and his presence of mind saved us from danger on several occasions. His homely humour and his patriotic songs kept us all from breaking down under the strain of an absconding life.

"I don't want to die", he suddenly began talking in an excited voice, as I started to sketch, "I could not do much in the time I have been in the Party. I had only succeeded in gripping the Red Banner and nothing more. I cannot die now when my country suffers the worst famine, is being crushed under the weight of the national crisis and is facing the greatest of perils, fascist invasion. I must get out of this disgraceful bed, I must get out quick. This is not the time for me to die."

He was gasping for breath but continued talking. He railed against Purnendu for hesitating to write to the Provincial Committee and the Central Committee—Party workers were suffering starvation and becoming victims of all sorts of diseases just when their services were needed most.

Then he quietened down. He sent his salutations to the All-India Students' Federation for organising the "Chittagong Week."

He soon got a grip over himself and went on with what I later realised was his last message to all the comrades in Bengal and all over India. He said:

"Tell everyone, when you go to Calcutta, that our people here know that to save Chittagong is to save Bengal. So the Chittagong comrades fight on with every drop of their blood. But we alone cannot pay the cost of safety for all. Let all the hands join us to lift the common weight and then Chittagong will be able to play effectively her part as the frontier district with full support from all sister districts.

"When you go to Bombay, tell Comrade Joshi that Chittagong guards the Eastern Gate of India and she will stick to her post. Famine and epidemics are the two most deadly enemies of Chittagong and we have not the strength left to fight them alone. It is a disgraceful admission of our weakness, I know, but facts must be faced.

"We will face the next bombing season, within a month, and this time will be the last time

but the most trying one. If the people from all the provinces do not take the most serious notice and treat Chittagong as a soldier hungry and ill.... (he broke down but again recovered). But I know if Joshi gives the call and our great Party is mobilised all honest patriots can be roused to rush aid and succour to save Chittagong and save India."

His lips began quivering and the patriotic sparks shone brighter than ever in his eyes. He epitomised in his person the suffering of the people of Chittagong. He had only one thought: that Chittagong be helped to play her part in the defence of India. He had no thought for his own self but only for the Party and the people. Sketching him and listening to him I caught the spirit that makes Chittagong the land of heroes and martyrs.

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TEGRA

On 22nd April, 1930, the Chittagong revolutionaries clashed for the first time with British troops on Jalalabad Hill, near Chittagong. Fourteen year old "Tegra"—the youngest in the party—was that battle's first casualty.

At first, when plans were drawn up for battle—Tegra had been left out of it. For one thing, he was very, very young. Besides, he was the youngest of three brothers. The eldest looking after the home, while his second brother Loknath Bal and Tegra went to the revolution. Of her three sons, the mother liked Loknath and Tegra most. She was proud of their revolutionary work. She had pleaded with Masterda (Surjya Sen), "Don't take away both my sons—leave Tegra with me." Masterda agreed. Tegra was to stay behind with his mother and help re-organise our forces after the battle. That is why Tegra's name was not on the list when the call-up was ordered.

It was afternoon—18th April, 1930. Tegra had plunged into a pool for a swim with his playmates. They spent hours in the water—racing with each other, splashing water about. It was great fun and the boys had lost count

of time. When they got out of the water—three hours had slipped by. Tegra crept home, sheepish and shame-faced. And his mother was annoyed and gave him a tight slap on the ear for it. Tegra was angry and would not eat all day. Why had mother flared up like that? As if he had been in the water for so long just to annoy her!

Tegra sulked the rest of the day, but at dusk, he got wind of something brewing among the revolutionaries. His brother, Loknath, was one of the leaders. There was something special about their movements that evening—a hint of caution, of preparation. Tegra could not sit and sulk any more. He followed his brother to the Congress House—where Masterda was giving battle orders to the revolutionaries. When they caught sight of young Tegra, it was already too late to send him back. So he became one of those in charge of sorting out and distributing arms taken in the course of the Armoury Raid.

The plan was to make a raid on the Chittagong Armoury and to break up the police lines and block the entry of the military into the district. In this way they would hold Chittagong and for seven days Chittagong would be free. On the seventh day, when the British rushed reinforcements, the revolutionaries would die to a man defending their freedom.

But after the Armoury Raid was over, they had to march to battle on the second day itself—and young Tegra was one of them. They had a stiff climb over hilly wastes—without food and water. But they thought they were marching on a great mission—hunger and fatigue was unimportant. They had to take cover—lying flat, clutching a rock or shrubs on the barren hill-sides, with the April sun blazing down on them. They had to push on at dead of night—hungry, thirsty and footsore.

It was the fourth day of the march—April 22nd. Ambika Chakravarty managed to get two unripe water-melons from somewhere. They were carefully cut into 60 pieces. There were 58 altogether—Ambika ordered one piece per person.

One tiny piece did not quench your thirst or hunger

—it only made you feel still more thirsty. But they filed past—taking one piece each. But at the end it was discovered that the two extra pieces had vanished, nothing was left over.

Everyone knew Ambika was very strict when in action. He would not tolerate the slightest lapse from the revolutionary code of morals and iron discipline. He asked the unit, drawn up in formation, who had taken the two extra pieces. Tegra walked up boldly and said in a clear voice: "I have. I was very hungry, that's why." He had realised his mistake and was ready to take any punishment. Ambika slapped him on both cheeks and sent him off. The unit breathed a sigh of relief and relaxed.

Not long afterwards, shots rang out. Under cover of darkness, the revolutionaries made their final preparations. Suddenly, the British forces opened fire from the hill opposite. As soon as the revolutionaries stood up in formation to return fire—Tegra fell from a British bullet. Before orders came to open fire, the revolutionaries' first line was mown down.

But Tegra did take part in the battle. He opened fire, lying down with a bullet in his chest. He held out till the firing ceased. It was time now to retreat and escape capture. Tegra had become very weak through continuous bleeding. His throat was parched. "Some water, dada"—he asked his brother next to him. He got a stern reply: "Revolutionaries should never betray signs of weakness." Tegra kept quiet after that. At dawn, 11 bodies were counted on Jalalabad Hill. One of them was Tegra's.

Tegra was a student in the ninth class in the local Municipal School. He had been nicknamed 'Tiger' because he was headstrong and obstinate even as a child. He was loved as a mischievous child and they changed 'Tiger' into the pet name 'Tegra'.

He was a fine-looking, sturdy lad. In 1927-28, the revolutionaries opened **akharas** and gymnasiums in Chit-tagong. Tegra joined them, together with his brothers. Like them, he took the revolutionary path. He learnt the

art of sword and dagger play, boxing, horsemanship and sniping.

After the raid, I met his mother. Their house was next door to my aunt's in the 'Pathuriaghata' area of Chittagong. She burst into tears and said, "He went away to battle because I scolded him that day." The neighbours, too, wept at his death. They loved this dare-devil youngster.

Boys of Tegra's age in Chittagong today are, unhappily, very different. Recently, I saw a boy, about eight or nine years old, whose face was drawn and haggard, like an adult's. A woman, about twenty to twenty-five years old, sat near him. She was laughing and joking with the cooks in the kitchen of an army camp across the street. When I spoke to him, he said he did not know the woman, but had come to the kitchen to collect a few crumbs thrown away by the cooks. He said he was poor and destitute, but also said that his father was a day-labourer and earned Rs. 8 daily, so the family had enough to eat. He talked in an evasive way and I noticed that he was contradicting himself now and then. But I could not imagine he had made up the whole story. But as soon as he left, I was told by a neighbour that the boy comes to the kitchen, acting as a pimp for the woman who sold herself to the soldiers in the camp. Today in the streets of Chittagong one often comes across boys like this.

Why should I speak only of boys who loaf about the streets? There is no freshness and youthful idealism left among school-boys either. In Dharampur High School, for instance, some of the students in Class Eight ask their teacher right inside the class-room, "Please teacher, will you have some *lal pani* (wine)?" The teacher gets thunder-struck, but the boys giggle their heads off. It is supposed to be a huge joke! In Patia, a tea-shop owner has been complaining that school boys come to have tea and leave empty wine-bottles behind under the tables.

When there were boys like Tegra in Chittagong, parents were proud of their boys and girls and there was a healthy relationship between them. That is why, there

has been co-education between boys and girls in the village schools in Chittagong ever since the girls' school in the town was closed down after Japanese air raids in 1942. But today, their relations have been poisoned. Boys make sloppy remarks about their fellow girl students when "The Legends of Greece and Rome" are studied in the class-rooms and they come across descriptions of Venus. Sathazari High School is near the army barracks. On every mile-stone along the road near the barracks, names and full details about the girl students in the school have been carved out by the boy students. Soldiers read them, cut vulgar jokes and misbehave with the girls.

Things have gone so far that parents are desperate. Even the socially advanced want co-education to go.

Last July, a gymnasium was opened for the youth of Chittagong town. Twenty-two boys joined up at first, but now thirty-three are quite regularly attending. Local public men are taking keen interest. The old comrades of Surjya Sen and Tegra who are out of jail—including those who are Communists today—come and help the boys, recapture the spirit of Surjya Sen and Tegra. But most of the stalwarts of the gymnasium are school and college students themselves. Chiren Sarkar of the Students' Federation is one of them. Even those boys who were suspicious of the SF have turned up to work enthusiastically in the gymnasium—although they have not yet joined the SF. SF students too have got rid of their former suspicions about these boys. One Sunday, Chiren made a short speech pointing out the evils that have crept into the school and college students' life. A student from the town collegiate school got up and said:

"Right under our noses, awful things are done at school. Cheating in exams, petty thefts and vulgar talk is going on most of the time. Amazing that we were blind to it all so far. Today I see clearly how wrong all this is and I am sure we shall fight it."

One day, smoking was the subject of a talk. Smoking was banned in the club brotherhood but one or two

boys used to smoke in secret. During the lecture, all the boys began staring at these two. From that day the smokers felt so small that they stopped coming to the club. But the other boys are full of enthusiasm—they want to become ideal sons of Chittagong.

It is only a few years since Tegra's martyrdom. But in these days of national distress, his heritage has been smashed to pieces. If we can get back Tegra's leaders and colleagues who are still in jail after 10 to 17 years, boys like Tegra will grow up in the homes of Chittagong again.

ONCE ALL STOOD BY US . . .

In 1937 when the New Constitution was inaugurated and in every province the Ministry came into our hands, our people began to hope that their exiled children would now be brought back home.

Behind the prison walls, there was no limit to our joy, no end to our hopes. To think of having Congress Ministries in no less than seven provinces, and in others, though there were no Congress Ministries, but at least Ministries run by our own countrymen—to think of all this made us overjoyed at the prospect of immediate release, and there was nothing else that we could think of in those days.

When Santi and Suniti were sentenced to transportation for life for the murder of the Comilla Magistrate, Stevens, their Counsel, Mr. B. C. Chatterji is said to have told them—"Though the sentence is for life, yet you won't have to stay long in prison. There will be a general amnesty with the New Constitution and you all will be free."

Our hopes were not therefore without reason.

But the Provincial Ministries seemed to be making no efforts at all.

After waiting for a long time, the Andaman prisoners started hunger strike over the three demands for (a) their repatriation from the Andamans (b) the inclusion of all political prisoners in class II, and (c) general release for

all. Simultaneously, political prisoners in all the Indian jails started hunger strike as a mark of solidarity with them and to support their demands.

A vast movement grew out of the nation's fullest support behind the prisoners' demands. From one corner of India to another, deepest anxiety moved the millions. Gandhiji and other leaders came forward to take up our cause.

The Bengal Government promised to implement the first two demands immediately, while the third was to be considered later.

Gandhiji sent his word that in one year he would bring them back free, and asked them to give up hunger strike.

From November 1937, the prisoners began to be repatriated from the Andamans. Bengal's sons came back to Bengal's prisons.

Early in 1938, my father came to see me in jail and told me that Rabindranath himself had got in touch with the Governor for my release, and showed me a brief letter written to Father in his own handwriting: "I have done whatever I could for your daughter, the final results are not yet due. I hope the effort will not be in vain." I also found that he had sent a few lines of blessings to me. Father also mentioned how Rev. C. F. Andrews had been trying hard to get us out of prison. At one place he wrote to Father: "I am going to meet the Governor in connection with your daughter. Do pray to God at the time of the interview so that the mission may succeed." He also asked Father to inform him by wire the day I would be released.

Father also went and saw Gandhiji who promised to do his utmost for the release of all the prisoners. Meanwhile, we too met Gandhiji in prison. Among other things, he told me that Nazimuddin (who was then the Home Minister) was reluctant to release the Armoury Raid prisoners including myself, but yet he would try his best.

I was not put out in the least, for I was confident that in any case I would be released. When a man like Gurudev

Rabindranath had been fighting for our release, when a foreigner like C. F. Andrews was ready to do his utmost in sympathy with the just demands of the prisoners, then we could not but be released.

We, the girls were all released, and so were the detenus. But only a handful among the convicted were set free.

On my release I wrote to Rabindranath and Andrews in gratitude for all the efforts they had made for my release. Gurudev wrote back:

"I am glad to get your letter. You have got back your freedom after a long time. Now may you gain in peace and strength day by day. Many a task is yet to be done in our country and they demand an unruffled and disciplined mind. May the experience of suffering bring fullness to your life—this is my blessing to you.

Your well-wisher
Rabindranath Tagore."

24-6-38.

Letters came also from Andrews. He was at that time convalescing in a sanatorium in Madras after a serious illness. Yet he used to write me long letters. He was eager to know how I had passed my days, and how I would plan out my future. He also conveyed to me his joy at my release.

His letters betrayed an intense love for this country and for her sons and daughters. Once he wrote: "It seems you were my daughter in a previous birth. Now that I am old, my daughter has come back to me. Don't forget to remember this old man from time to time."

Not only did these noble souls agitate for our release when we were in prison but were equally concerned for us after our release: when we were free they blessed us so that we might decide our course with a calm and disciplined mind.

I don't have all their letters with me today. Father preserved everyone of these letters carefully. He trea-

sured them with incredible care. Two years back when our family moved to Calcutta, everything except the barest essentials were left behind at Chittagong.

This time when I went in search of the letters, I found that white ants had eaten them up along with all the other papers kept in a closed room all this time. Only two short letters from Rabindranath could be recovered.

Rabindranath is no more with us, and noble-hearted Andrews is also gone.

That day Rabindranath had given the call: "Bengal stands by her exiled sons."

Seven years have passed since then, and yet Ananta Singh and other pre-reform prisoners linger on in prison.

Our leaders may have forgotten them, but our people still remember their brave sons.

So it was that Comrade Niranjana Sen went round Bengal's leaders belonging to the Congress, League, Mahasabha, Krishak Proja and other organisations to remind them of the prisoners' demand for freedom and of their own pledge to the prisoners.

Niranjanda was a contemporary of Ananta and Ganeshda and with them began his own revolutionary life. He was also Masterda's (Surjya Sen's) favourite. When Masterda was detained in Ratnagiri prison under the Bengal Ordinance, Niranjanda was with him. On his release, he was convicted in the Machuabazar Bomb Case and he too was sent to the Andamans. On the expiry of his sentence he was again kept under detention until his release as a result of the famous Release Campaign of 1937-38.

On coming out of prison, he engaged himself for the release of his comrades still in prison, whom he had come to love and respect through the storm and stress of revolutionary activity as also through the privations and struggles inside the prison.

All through these years, Niranjanda has never given up his efforts to organise a country-wide campaign for their release.

This time with Gandhiji's release, many Congress

prisoners have one by one come out of prison. But to our leaders, those heroes behind the bars remain as but forgotten prisoners.

Recently Niranjanda began his efforts to revive the campaign for their release. The love of our people for these heroes was demonstrated in the spontaneous response that was evoked with the least effort everywhere the campaign was organised. But not so with our leaders.

When in May this year Niranjanda approached Congress leader Shri Prafulla Ghosh, and a Working Committee Member at that, all he could get was that "the Congress had not the strength to get them freed". Shri Kiron Sankar Roy of the Official Congress could hold out no hope until Wavell's return (this was before the Simla Conference). Shri Santosh Basu, leader of the "Bose Congress" confessed that only the Governor himself could set them free. Mr. Fazlul Huq was unwilling to move without Shyamaprosad Babu's advice, while Shyamaprosad Babu himself refused to stir. The League leaders, Sir Nazimuddin and Mr. Suhrawardy, also waited for Wavell to do something.

Not only that. In the coming elections, Chittagong's beloved son Ananta Singh sought permission to stand as a candidate for Chittagong, and when the Governor turned it down, Shyamaprosad's paper **Nationalist** jeeringly headlined it, "ANANTA SINGH GETS A REBUFF FROM THE GOVERNMENT." Could there be a more telling testimony to the depth of utter depravity to which we have descended by the calamities of the last few years?

To these leaders, who have been installed where they were by the generous sacrifice of the very lives of many of these heroes and of the best years in the lives lost by many more of them, to them all, there is but one question I am tempted to put to-day: "Standing on this sacred soil of Bengal, sanctified with the warm and precious blood of her brave sons, don't you feel ashamed to continue with this mockery of leadership?"

HOW I BECAME A COMMUNIST

It was the night of the 17th of September 1932. I was captured, dressed in male attire, near the Pahartali Club in Chittagong, on my way to keep an appointment with the absconding leaders. At the time I was not an absconder myself, but a student in the Fourth Year Science of the local Government College.

Rather unusual and mysterious the whole incident looked no doubt. To find me in male attire near the Club at night was the least expected thing in the world and the police could make nothing out of it.

For sometime past, the Intelligence Branch marked me out as a suspect, as being one likely to have come in contact with the revolutionaries. But the lack of evidence against me baffled them. The police watch got tired of waiting upon me day and night, and one after another would go and report the same thing in almost a monotonous repetition: "She could never be seen to be stirring out of her house except for going to College and coming back from there." The Principal and the professors would say: "But she is a quiet and well-behaved girl and her attendance is very regular." The authorities therefore decided to keep me in custody, as they were anxious to make a thorough investigation to make sure about me.

Just a week later, on the 24th of September, the Pahartali Club was raided by the revolutionaries under Preeti's leadership and it was there too that Preeti met her death.

The police became convinced that I too was a revolutionary and an accomplice of Preeti. But as yet they could not proceed with the Pahartali Raid Trial owing to the absence of evidence and lack of witnesses. So they sent me up for trial as an accused under Section 109 and granted me bail. This section is applied only in the case of those who conceal their identity for immoral purposes!

Within a couple of days of my release on bail came Masterda's letter directing me to abscond. What an unbelievable joy overcame me that day! Once women were

banned from recruitment in a terrorist party, and we had come to look upon ourselves as greatly fortunate on just being permitted to join it. Now it was not only a question of enlisting, but far beyond that—to have the privilege of being near Masterda and of working with him under his direct personal guidance. Such a thing was beyond one's life-long expectations, as it were.

In December I escaped while still on bail. My trial was still on: though prosecuting me under Section 109, the police were really anxious to prove that after the Armoury Raid, the seized arms had been kept concealed by me, that I had tried to recruit other girls in the party and that I had been connected with various activities of the revolutionaries, and so on.

The people just laughed and commented: "What nonsense—a political case under Section 109!"

As a fugitive, I was with Masterda and moved with him from place to place, while getting ready for our future plan of action. Masterda used to recount the stories of revolutionary boys and exhort us to stand by our ideals, while Phutuda used to train us in the manufacture of bombs and other explosives and ask us to write down everything in detail in the hope that when we would be gone they would be of use to those who came after us.

Masterda was captured in February 1933, but we could manage to clear out of the police cordon. Three months later in May, myself and Phutuda were arrested together. All three of us were tried together, they were both sentenced to death while I was given life transportation. The judge on the Special Tribunal in his judgment said that I was not given death sentence because I was a woman and of young age.

So I came to prison. On the 12th of February 1934, both Masterda and Phutuda were hanged, but it was only months later that our other prisoners smuggled the news to me.

Though their loss overwhelmed me, I could never reconcile myself to the idea of having to rot in prison for

the rest of my life. Rather, I was confident that in two to four years we were going to be free. I used to enthuse others by my confident calculation that our countrymen would not rest in peace so long as we were kept behind bars, they were bound to bring us out of prison.

All along the one dominant thought was about the unfulfilled work that we had left behind and how on our return we would expand it eliminating all the weaknesses and defects that had been found in it.

So, the first concern on going to prison was to keep the mind and the body healthy and sound. There was also the resolution that while in prison, we must not violate the prevailing rules and regulations nor create any disturbances so far it was consistent with dignity and self-respect. I used to read religious books regularly and eagerly—not only those that were sent from home but also by borrowing, many of them from the jail library, for I had the belief that this way the mind could be strengthened and the will power brought under control.

Immediately upon my conviction I was taken to Hijli Special Jail, where there was plenty of opportunity to read among the other women detenus and prisoners of Div. II. But in three months I was moved away from there, while in those three months I did not do much reading at all. My entire concentration was to prepare myself for future work with religious studies to tune the mind and care for health to steel the body.

Three or four years later it was decided to keep all the women political prisoners together. Many of them had the opportunity to learn about happenings in the world outside through long periods of stay with the rest of the detenus, and a few periodicals and journals of a progressive type like the **Parichaya** also began to trickle through the prison bars. From there I could hear about Communism from time to time and from them too came to me books of Socialism and Communism by Joad, Cole and Shaw.

The arguments and the approach of these books began to stir the mind and forced me to ponder over the differ-

ence that these have with the revolutionary literature in which I had been steeped so long. The narratives of revolutionary deeds, the lives of Khudiram, Kanailal, Bhagat Singh no doubt stirred us to the very core, teaching us to defy death: but these writings on Socialism and Communism could not be set aside as irrelevant, and so the faint rumblings of a new battle could be heard within myself.

These I began to read avidly, but understood in my own way, fitting them into the trend of my own thoughts: and so it seemed that Communism was all right and that there was no difference between it and our own ideas. When someone would say that the Communists looked upon the terrorists as opponents, I would just laugh it off and could never believe it. If our ideals were the same and both of us had dedicated ourselves to the cause of freedom, then we were but fellow-travellers and could never be opponents. And yet I could not help confessing to myself that the Communists were more widely-read and knew a lot more than us of men and things, of the world at large and of the people and their past, and so I nurtured a sneaking admission of our own inferiority.

Hardly any news of the outside world would reach us. We were not permitted to get daily newspapers, but for us was sanctioned the Weekly Overseas Edition of the *Statesman*, as also the organ of die-hard Hindu reaction, *Sanjivani* and that too the weekly edition.

The paper had a special attraction for us for a special reason: it used to publish news about the prisoners. But in the absence of any other paper, we used to eagerly read it through and through every week. And though the angry condemnation in its columns of girls learning to dance would amuse rather than excite or enrage us, the reading of consistent anti-Soviet propaganda, with a special dose of vituperation against Stalin written by one Jatin Majumdar appearing regularly on its last page, I must say had its effect on me, and unconsciously and imperceptibly I began to take in these trends directed against progressive movements.

Thus while maintaining a good attitude towards Socialism, I acquired a strong bias against Stalin. No doubt the Government's desperate efforts to stifle the progressive line of thought among the imprisoned revolutionaries did bear fruits at least partially. Even if it failed to turn our face away from progress, at least it helped to confuse us and thereby push a wedge into our trend of thinking.

When my mind was passing through such stormy battles, a copy of Romain Rolland's **I Will Not Rest** came to my hand. I had already become attached to Rolland's writings through such books as **Jean Christophe** and **Soul Enchanted**. **I Will Not Rest** not only brought forth a deep respect towards the Revolution in Russia, but I also began to worship Lenin's greatness.

After this, an intense eagerness for study gripped me. One urge hit me again and again: I must read more and know more; I must have a clear understanding of the society in which I live, in which I have grown up and which has made me what I am.

In 1937, with the introduction of Provincial Autonomy, a vast popular movement was started outside for the immediate release of all political prisoners held without trial and for the repatriation and release of the Andaman prisoners.

The Andaman prisoners came back to the Indian jails, the prisoners without trial were set free, and three long-term prisoners of the Armoury Raid were also released on the ground of their young age.

I began marking time for my release.

Father brought me the cheering news that Rabindranath and Andrews had themselves got in touch with the Governor for my release.

A few days later, the jail authorities informed me that Gandhiji would himself be coming to see us in Midnapore Jail, where we were then lodged. I could not sleep at night, so overjoyed I was at the thought—not so much of release but that the greatest in our nation would be coming to see us. My mind was full of questions—as to what

to tell him and what not to. Owing to ill-health, Gandhiji could not come to Midnapore. We were taken down to the Presidency Jail in Calcutta to meet him. It struck me that day that for such a great man perhaps there was nothing that he could not do, and so people could not but respect him.

After a little conversation, Gandhiji spoke to me: "Nazimuddin is extremely angry with you, and says none of the Chittagong Armoury Raid Case would be released, but yet I am trying for you."

But I was firmly convinced that the Government would not dare to ignore such a gigantic popular upsurge. Even when all our girls were released one by one, and I was left alone behind the bars I could not give up hope.

The 1st of May 1939. The Government at last had to yield to popular pressure and I came out with the eager desire to get down to work with fresh enthusiasm.

At the jail gate my father and my cousin Jhumku came to receive me. Jhumku was also convicted in the Armoury Case and had been released the year before on account of his young age, after eight years in prison.

After reaching us at our place, he went away promising to call again the next day.

From next day, many people began pouring in to meet me—both familiar and unfamiliar faces could be seen among them. Those who were younger demanded almost in childish tone that I must work with them. Many were scandalised to find that I had not decided about my future. Some of the older ones came and advised me: "The Communists will get at you. Ananta, Ganesh and the rest of them have not turned Communist." One went to the extent of showing me a "letter" from Ambikada asking me to act strictly according to his directions. Some also added: "Anantada and others have turned out from the Party the three from the Chittagong group who had joined the Communists."

Many did not hesitate to shower sermons and warn me at the same time: "It seems so-and-so had come to see you, but don't commit yourself to anything."

I did not know what to reply to these, whom to believe and how to disbelieve any of them since all of them once belonged to the **Swadeshi**. And yet softening down as far as I could, I said: "You will come to know later with whom I shall work and what I shall do."

Some time later, I went out with Kamala Chatterji, who was a detenu and had come out the year before. On the road Kamala stopped a boy who was passing by in a frightful hurry, and said: "Listen, this is Kalpana Dutt of Chittagong and has just been released." "What can I do about it?" curtly replied the boy and went away without even turning to me. Kamala explained to me: "He belongs to the Communist Party, and could not wait as he is on some urgent errand."

Kamala took me to the Labour Party Office in Gangadhar Lane. Many Communist boys used to come there as it was the only place where they could openly meet each other.

Kamala introduced me to many of them. From there a friend took me to Niharendu Dutta Majumdar's where some of the Labour Party met me and gave me a few books on sociology, biology etc., to read on my return to Chittagong.

I was perplexed and worried. In these few years, the outside world seemed to have changed beyond recognition.

I went to Putudi (Suhasini Ganguli) who had also been released from detention the previous year. I asked her if she had any news of Anantada and others, and told her all that I had heard about them on my release. Putudi said "Ananta, Ganesh and the whole Chittagong group have turned Communists." And she advised me to get all the information from Jhumku.

To escape all this babel of voices and to avoid falling into the hands of these boys from different groups, I went straight to Jhumku's mess next day. Three others were staying there, and they were all Communists. Jhumku also had joined the Communists in jail. I wanted to know from him all about everyone of those who had questioned and talked to me so far. He just replied: "If we get you

among us we would of course be very happy. But we don't want to bring you over to us on false pretences or by any other unfair means. It is for you to watch, to listen, to understand and then to do what you think best. If you are anxious to read, we can help you with books. We can do nothing more than this. It is for you to judge and find out as to who is telling the truth, who is lying, I have nothing to say on that point."

The tone of his comments did strike me as something new: since coming out, I had been hearing either adulations or open lies by various people to get me into their own respective groups. So, when I left for Chittagong, I went with a feeling of respect for the Communists.

A week later I was at Chittagong. And found that among the old acquaintances only those who had turned Communists were the ones still active. They would go among the Railway workers, among the dock workers to build up labour unions; they would work among the kisans, try to organise the students through the Students' Federation. The rest were mostly inactive, while a handful were trying to form new groupings. I began to work with the Communists since I could not remain inactive, and told them to help me to understand Communism clearly.

I began with a little work and coupled it with some reading. I would go to the Santal **Para** and teach the coolies, and also to the **Mali** (scavengers) **Para** and **Dhobi** (washermen) **Para** and hold secret meetings there.

I had heard that membership of the Communist Party was earned only after having been tested at work in some mass organisation. Since there was no scope for me to work in a mass organisation, I was under the impression that I could not become a Party member since it was very difficult to be one.

Sometimes I would be upset with someone's conduct: some would come to lecture upon free love in the name of Communism, and this made no sense to me. Sometimes I would find well-off boys having no scruples to squander 2 or 3 rupees at a teashop before the very eyes of starving

comrades, they would defend their action by saying that the Communists don't give way to sentiments.

But I heaved a sigh of relief and felt cheered up when I found that those who indulged in such words or actions had long gone out of the Communist Party or were about to be thrown out of it. There is no room for moral slackness in the Communist Party, nor for the self-centred and the selfish. Those who could correct themselves, only they remain, and plenty of opportunity is given to them to correct and improve themselves. Those who cannot or do not mend themselves are expelled from the Party.

From prison, Anantada and Ganeshda wrote to me, saying: "One could not be a Communist without having a fund of sympathy and understanding. Sentiment by itself is not a bad thing."

I came back to Calcutta after appearing at the B.A. Examination in April 1940.

It was decided from the Party that I should work in the Kisan Sabha Office, and sometime later as a whole-timer in the Tramway Workers' Union office. I had come from the middle class having no idea of the life of the kisan and the worker or of their movement. Before going to work among them, it was necessary that I should get at least an elementary knowledge about them, and also at the same time provision was made for teaching me Marxism.

Long afterwards I realised that one could not learn Marxism nor become a Marxist oneself from books alone.

In July, I got admission in the Post-Graduate Section of the Science College. The war had just begun. Seven months later I was served with a notice directing me to leave Calcutta within 24 hours and to be interned in my own home at Chittagong.

This time my job was to keep running the secret apparatus of the illegal Party. It included the despatching of all Provincial Committee and Central Committee circulars, books and papers to different areas in the district, arranging for the sending of hands to different areas; fixing up shelters and dumps in the town; organising the dis-

tribution of leaflets in different places; and together with all this, to taking a few study circles.

As the Dhobi Para and the Mali Para were near at hand, it was not impossible for me to visit them and through them to get my jobs done, even when interned, eluding both the family and the outsiders. It was beyond the calculation of the police that the children of the lowest sections in society like the washermen and the scavengers could come forward in such work or that we could work through them. So, I was not under any ban to talk to these children who would call at our place.

Besides, in the eyes of the police, I was still a terrorist and too openly known to undertake any secret work. Not only the police, practically everybody except the very few who themselves were directly connected with them, could hardly suspect my doing these jobs. The police might have miscalculated, but the Party did not: to them I was an ex-terrorist girl, best equipped to undertake such secret work, and all the more safe since the police, they counted, would go in for just the miscalculation that they actually made.

Towards the end of 1941, the menace of Japanese invasion became threatening in Chittagong, and at the same time, the restrictions, upon me were released. We took up the work of building up women's organisation for self-defence, and at the same time began anti-Jap propaganda. From all quarters came remarkable response to the little campaigning that we did.

To the **bhadralogs** and the middle class on the whole we said: "The education, culture and tradition that you have built up with your own hands would be reduced to ruins with the Japanese invasion. The great national movement that you have built up through fifty years of struggle and toil will be ruthlessly effaced under the Japanese regime."

To the women in general we went and exhorted them: "It is time to get ready for resistance against the Japs in self-defence and for the defence of your honour."

Among the kisans we explained: "The struggle for resistance against the Japs is the struggle in defence of your food and cloth, your property and land."

Through this we could rouse the natural patriotism and the hatred against slavery in everybody, because the Japanese invasion was a thing which was real and imminent to them. And through all these, the mass organisations grew in strength and activity.

We ourselves were roused and encouraged by this tremendous response. The dream that we had nurtured since the days of Masterda was for us about to be realised, for this unique combination of circumstances now offered to us the opportunity to prove what we had wanted to do in the terrorist days, namely, that even a powerful enemy could be defeated by guerilla method of warfare.

In December 1942, we came to the first Party School in Bombay. Here we could understand after having been shown pointedly, where our weakness lay: it was true that the people responded to our call. It was also true they were even behind us. But how little was the change that we could bring about in them that would sustain them through the complexities of today and how meagre was the strength that we could infuse in them to battle through those difficulties!

With British imperialism on top of us, the internal order of the country was bound to be shattered under the stress of the war, and an acute economic crisis was inevitable. A National Government alone could have saved the situation.

It was easy to rouse anti-Jap sentiments where the Japanese menace was evidently real; even the spirit of active resistance was possible to be infused. But elsewhere it could make no sense to the patriots: the only thing clear to them was that under conditions of subjection there was nothing much that could be done.

The denial of a National Government by British imperialism and its detention of the national leaders at a moment of such grave national crisis helped only to in-

tensify this feeling of frustration and inaction, and this was bound to spread all over the country.

On our return from the Party School, we found the shadows of the famine looming large over Chittagong. 1943 had not gone a long way when the hungry men and women had taken to the road and we organised **Kitchuri-centres** (gruel centres) to alleviate their hunger. On the other side, the greedy hoarder could be seen busy grabbing the very food that the hungry were denied.

The tribe of the **bhadralog** from which we ourselves have come, lost their integrity and their deeds failed to keep upto their morals. Though offering sympathy with the distress of the kisan, they reconciled themselves to the hoarders to satisfy their daily needs.

It is true that our work received their blessings and many had also come forward to help us out of shame for their own weakness. But they did not stand up against the hoarder to uproot him from society. And in the post-famine period, it was the hoarder who became omnipotent. Nearly two lakhs perished in this Chittagong alone: the kisan lost all his property and his land, and many went away in search of work and their women found themselves in the Labour Corps and the gnawing of hunger drove them to sell their honour in exchange of the vice of disease.

Children have lost their badge of innocence. They have turned into waifs to be seen everywhere. The purity and tenderness on their faces are gone, and a weird, unnatural impress has come over them. They have learnt to earn even at this age—tips from the military in their pockets, biris and cigarettes in their mouth. Some have turned pimps that deal in the honour of their own mothers and sisters.

Home and family have no meaning for them, for they are growing up in a stinking hell where life has no sanctity.

Peace has fled even from the home of the **bhadralogs**. The daily needs which they thought could be met by letting the hoarder have his way, have actually gone on

increasing, and step by step they are ending up by becoming slaves of these very hoarders. They have lost their long-cherished self-respect, while discontent at home has been on the increase; their children and they themselves too are on the road to depravity having lost all moral values.

They could be rallied for no work and the most that could be heard from the **bhadralog** is either "We are good for nothing" or "Do something for us".

In Chittagong most of us who have come to the Communist Party once belonged to terrorism. Despite our acceptance of Communism and our pride to call ourselves Communists, our mode of thinking and of work bears the clear impress of terrorist individualism. In 1930-31 we, a handful of boys and girls, came out to fight British imperialism relying on our strength. But long after our joining the ranks of the Communists, even as late as the dark days of 1943, we still betrayed our old mind when we sneakingly believed—whatever might be our open professions to the contrary—that we by our strength will be able to stave off the calamity that was then overtaking our people.

But 1943 was not 1930. In 1930 whatever little success we scored was due to the fact that the people were behind us and it was just a straight traditional fight against the Government. But now the situation had become complex and was ten times worse with our people surcharged with despair and inaction and the enemy in our midst and amongst our own people, and therefore undetected. Naturally therefore, our own strength by itself could hardly suffice.

Most of the comrades in the villages fell seriously ill and went out of action. I myself was incapacitated by illness. The condition inside the Party began to worsen, despair and frustration infected some of the comrades themselves, and some even went out of the Party. Now, after such a gruelling experience, we realised where we went wrong, what was missing in our calculation.

It was obvious that our love for our people was only

a shallow, superficial sentiment. We did not know the people, and had very little knowledge and experience about them and their life. It was only a sentimental outburst of sympathy that led us to alleviate their heart-rending distress, and nothing more. Sympathy at their suffering, not an understanding of the life of the people was all that we had.

That is why when the floodgates of crisis were opened and distress and devastation overwhelmed them, it was unexpected even to us and we were dumbfounded for the time being. That day we realised that Marxism is no magic that could turn everything to gold or could bring us the moon. From the grim and bitter lessons of life, we have come to realise that Marxism is the science that helps us to **understand** society, the life of the people. All the warnings and anticipations that we had heard at the Party School were now found to be fulfilled one by one.

From this hard experience of life, we understood that Communism is real patriotism, and that patriotism does not mean a superficial and sentimental trust in the people nor blindly following the leaders, but the rousing of that self-confidence in the people which makes them the masters of their own destiny and conscious creators of their own future.

Terrorism gave us confidence in our own selves, and Communism confidence in the people. Terrorism teaches us to rely on our own moral virtues alone, Communism goes beyond that and teaches us to know the people, and the country, and also to change the people, and with them, ourselves.

And this too we have seen that for the little work that we have done, for our rallying ourselves in the fight against the people's enemy—the people have not grudged in the least to shower credit upon us. When rationing was introduced in Chittagong town, everybody said with one voice: "Communists really campaigned for rationing." Everyone recognises that in every activity for people's service, Communists voluntarily and selflessly participate. Our anti-Jap propaganda, our campaign for resistance and

self-defence did not take the people along the road to anarchy, and we have seen even in the worst days of distress that amidst crying-suffering there is hidden greatness in the people that fights on and refuses to surrender.

Comrade Ananga Sen's father is nearing seventy. He is not a Communist, nor a believer in Communism. He is a humble village school-master in the Primary School at Quepara. During the famine and the distress, most of the people left the school as the income was too low to maintain them. He is a very able teacher, and it is well-known that many High Schools implore him to join them, but he won't leave that Primary School in the village. During the famine, many a time he had to go without food, while many a time he had to take kichuri (gruel). And yet whenever anybody wanted him to come away at a higher salary, he has turned him away saying: "This school will not survive if I go away."

There is also the father of our District Secretary Comrade Jashoda Chakravarty. Two of his sons, Mokshada and Priyada, are still in prison serving life sentences in connection with Bathua Robbery Case. A few months ago, his only grandson also died. There is no earning member in the family, while their want and suffering know no bounds. Yet he has never for a moment taken to the path of dishonesty and untruth. He still carries on with his old vocation of a priest, and despite the almost unbearable load of hardships, he has always held his head high with a firmness born out of integrity of character. Society cannot but bow in reverence to the noble majesty of his personality.

This much for the middle class, but it is not confined to the middle class alone. Prasannabala comes of a peasant family; she is a middle-aged widow. In Raozan Thana, it was she who brought 250 women to the Nari Samiti. Though everyone of them was hit by distress, she had not allowed any of them to go out of the village, but they had stuck it out by working in the different houses. After the food famine came the cloth famine, which stood in the way of these distressed women earning

their own living, as scarcity of cloth makes it impossible for them to stir out of home.

Prasannabala decided that they should all together go out on a deputation to the District Magistrate in town.

The local Circle Officer hearing about this plan, tried to dissuade the leader of the deputation, Prasannabala, by tempting her with a pair of saris. Throwing the cloth at the face of the Circle Officer, Prasannabala said: "You cannot hide the shame of all of us by providing cloth for me." She came back without the cloth, and later on, she got all the women to go with her to the Magistrate and came back after extracting a promise of cloth from him.

Sarala had joined the Labour Corps driven by want and suffering. One day on her way to work, she found an orphan left on the roadside. She picked up the baby on her lap and brought her home to rear it. When I went to see her, she tenderly said: "Some unfortunate parents must have left him behind, perhaps they could no longer get him anything to eat. Now that I am earning something, I have brought him to mother him and to see him grow up."

Such examples may not be many, but we know our people are not dead, their patriotism can never die. Standing face to face with death, these men and women can rise to such noble heights while battling against hunger and misery all the time. For them, self-help is not a lesson to be learnt from books, but the part of their very life, and such greatness never dies.

Not only have they tried or succeeded in saving themselves. They can save the whole society, can instil self-confidence into our people, and transform the very face of society. And so life shall once more flow peacefully and contentedly in this beautiful nook of the world, that is our Chittagong.

To our Party too our respect and trust go all the more. So we can, with pride, declare that ours is the only Party that helps to understand and to explain life in its entirety, ours is the Party that comes forward to fight the peo-

ple's enemies and it is our Party that never for a moment loses faith in the people.

Among the old comrades whom on my release from prison, I found to have sunk into inactivity or to be busy trying to form new groupings, some are today thriving contractors, some profiteers and others black-marketeers.

The Chittagong daily, **Panchajanya** once won fame and esteem as a patriotic paper and piled up profits by publishing the details of the Armoury Raid Trial, but has gone down to such depths that today it does not care to write on the release of the brave leaders of the same Armoury Raid.

Today it is only the Communist Party that fearlessly and ruthlessly proclaims against all inequities and oppression. Through its papers, the Communist Party names the real enemies of the people and against whom the people is ranged. It is the Communist Party alone that has taught us how we can move forward keeping up our patriotic tradition, the tradition of Masterda, and how we can acquire unswerving faith in ourselves by investing our fullest confidence in our people.

